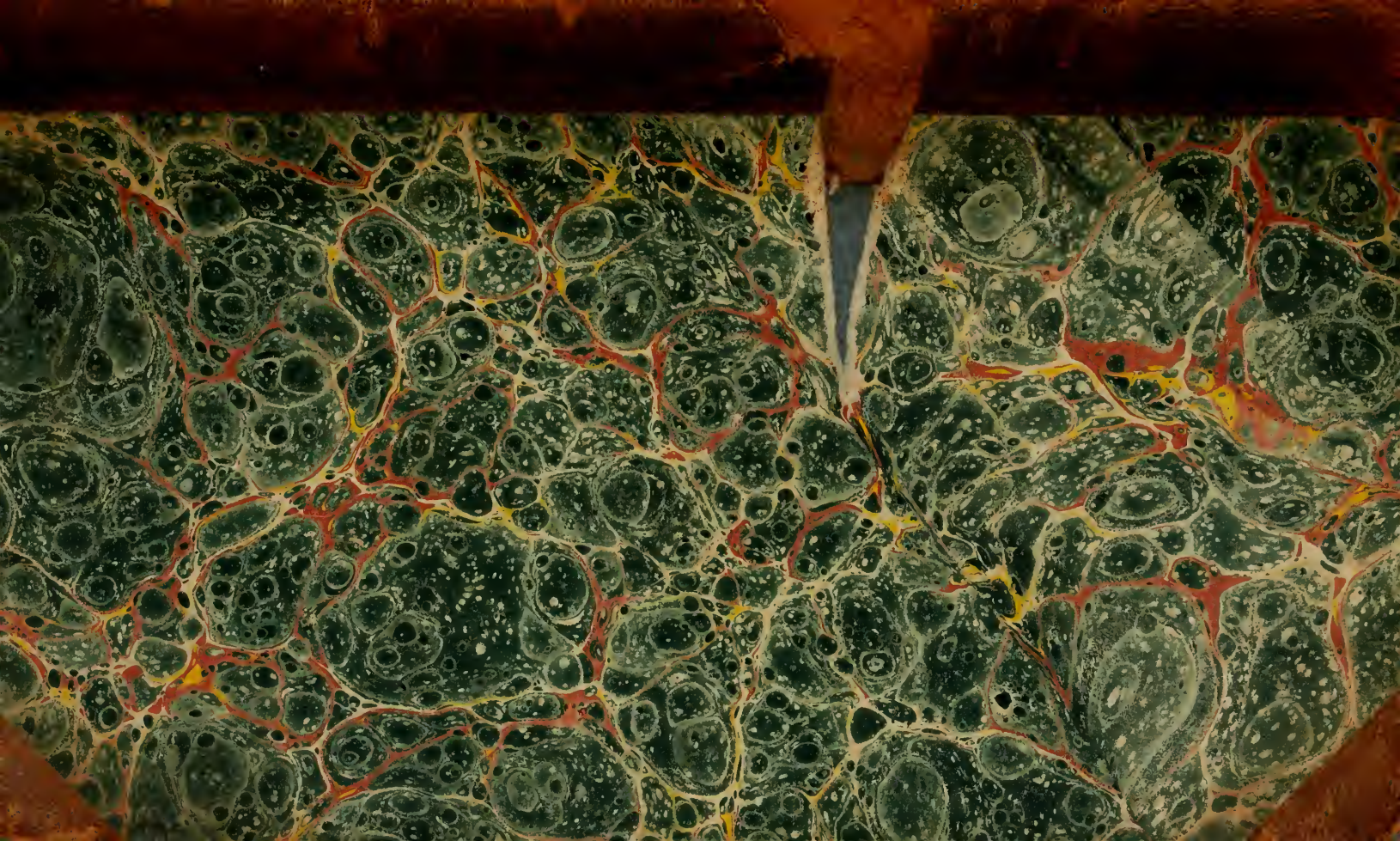

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THE

WORKS

OF THE

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DIALOGUES, LETTERS,

AND

ESSAYS,

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

CONTENTS.

Dialogues and Letters between Crispus and Gaius.

DIALOGUE I. Page.

On the Peculiar turn of the present Age. - - - - - - 9

DIALOGUE II.

On the Importance of truth. - - - - - - - - - - 15

DIALOGUE III.

On the connexion between Doctrinal, Experimental, and Practical Religion. - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 19

DIALOGUE IV.

On the Moral Character of God. - - - - - - - - - 23

DIALOGUE V.

On the Free-agency of Man. - - - - - - - - - - 27

DIALOGUE VI.

On the Goodness of the Moral Law. - - - - - - - - - 33

DIALOGUE VII.

On Antinomianism. - - - - - - - - - - - 37

DIALOGUE VIII.

On Human Depravity. - - - - - - - - - - - 41

DIALOGUE IX.

On the Total Depravity of Human Nature. - - - - - - 47

LETTER I.

On the Total Depravity of Human Nature. - - - - - - 51

LETTER II.

On the Total Depravity of Human Nature. - - - - - - 55

LETTER III.

On the Total Depravity of Human Nature. - - - - - - 61

LETTER IV.

Consequences resulting from the Doctrine of Human Depravity. - 67

LETTER V.

Consequences resulting from the Doctrine of Human Depravity. - - 71

Three conversations between Peter, James, and John.

CONVERSATION I.

On Imputation. - - - - - - - - - - - - - 79

CONVERSATION II.

On Substitution. - - - - - - - - - - - - 91

CONVERSATION III.

On Particular Redemption. - - - - - - - - - - 101

Answer to Three Queries. - - - - - - - 113

A Meditation on the Nature and Progressiveness of the Heavenly Glory. - - - - - - - - - 117

Antinomianism Contrasted with the Religion taught and exemplified in the Holy Scriptures.

Introduction. - - - - - - - - - - - - - 145

PART I.

Containing a Brief View of Antinomianism, with Arguments against the leading Principle from which it is denominated. - - 159

PART II.

The Influence of Antinomianism, in perverting some of the principal Doctrines of the Gospel, - - - - - - - - - 173

Spiritual Pride: or the Occasions, Causes, and Effects of High-mindedness in Religion; with Considerations exciting to Self-abasement,

Introduction, - - - - - - - - - - - - 193

SECTION I.

The Occasions, or Subjects, of Spiritual Pride, - - - - - 195

SECTION II.

The Causes of Spiritual Pride, - - - - - - - - - 213

The Awakened Sinner: a Correspondence between Archippus, a Minister of the Gospel, and Epaphras, a Young Man who had been one of his Hearers, - - - - - 221

Part of a Body of Divinity.

LETTER I.

On the Importance of System in the Study of Divinity, - - - - 253

LETTER II.

On the Importance of a true System, - - - - - - - 261

LETTER III.

On the Principal and General Outlines of the System, - - - - 271

LETTER IV.

On the Being of God, - - - - - - - - - - 277

LETTER V.

On the Necessity of a Divine Revelation, - - - - - - 283

LETTER VI.

On the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, - - - - - 289

LETTER VII.

On the uniform bearing of the Scriptures on the Person and Work of Christ, - - - - - - - - - - - - - 297

LETTER VIII.

On the Perfections of God, - - - - - - - - - - 301

LETTER IX.

On the Trinity; or, on the Father, Son, and Spirit being One God, - 307

Thoughts on Preaching.

LETTER I.

On Expounding the Scriptures, - - - - - - - - - 315

LETTER II.

On Sermons, and the Subject-matter of them, - - - - - 321

LETTER III.

On the Composition of a Sermon, - - - - - - - - - 327

The Great Question answered, - - - - - - 339

The Backslider: or an Inquiry into the Nature, Symptoms, and Effects of Religious Declension, with the Means of Recovery.

Introduction, - - - - - - - - - - - - - 355

SECTION I.

On the General Nature and Different Species of Backsliding, - 357

SECTION II.

On the Symptoms of a Backsliding Spirit, - - - - - - 371

SECTION III.

On the Injurious and Dangerous Effects of Sin lying upon the Conscience unlamented, - - - - - - - - - - - - - 379

SECTION IV.

On the Means of Recovery, - - - - - - - - - 389

Expository Remarks on the Discipline of the Primitive Churches, 403

A Vindication of Protestant Dissent, from the Charges of the Rev. Thomas Robinson, M. A., Vicar of St. Mary's, Leicester, - - - - - - - - - - 417

Remarks on Two Sermons, by Mr. W. W. Horne, of Yarmouth, entitled, The Faith of the Gospel Vindicated, - - 437

The Moral Law the Rule of Conduct to Believers, - 449

An Essay on Truth: containing an Inquiry into its Nature and Importance; with the Causes of Error, and the Reasons of its being permitted, - - - - - 455

DIALOGUES AND LETTERS

BETWEEN

CRISPUS AND GAIUS.

DIALOGUE I.

ON THE PECULIAR TURN OF THE PRESENT AGE.

Crispus. GOOD morning, my dear Gaius: I am glad to see you. The world is busy in grasping wealth, in discussing politics, and in struggling for dominion; all trifles of a moment: let us retire from the tumultuous scene, and discourse on subjects of greater importance.

Gaius. I am glad, my dear Crispus, to find your mind exercised on such subjects. The present agitated state of the world is doubtless a great temptation to many to let go their hold of heavenly things, and to bend their chief attention to subjects which originate and terminate in the present life.

Crispus. My mind has of late been much engaged on divine subjects. I find in them a source of solid satisfaction. Yet I must confess I feel as well a variety of difficulties which I should be happy to have removed. I have often found your conversation profitable, and should wish to avail myself of this and every other opportunity for improving by it.

Gaius. Suitable conversation on divine subjects is commonly of mutual advantage; and I must say there is something, I know not what, in the countenance of an inquisitive, serious friend, which, *as iron sharpeneth iron*, whets our powers, and draws forth observations where, otherwise, they had never existed. I think I have

been as much indebted to you for asking pertinent questions, as you have been to me for answering them.

Crispus. I have been lately employed in reading the works of some of our first Reformers; and, on comparing their times with the present, I have observed that a considerable difference has taken place in the state of the public mind. At the dawn of the Reformation, the bulk of mankind were the devotees of superstition, and stood ready to extirpate all those who dared to avow any religious principles different from theirs. Even the Reformers themselves, though they inveighed against the persecuting spirit of the Papists, yet seem to have been very severe upon one another, and to have exercised too little Christian forbearance, and too much of a spirit that savoured of unchristian bitterness toward those whose ideas of reformation did not exactly coincide with their own. A great deal of their language, and some parts of their conduct, would, in the present day, be thought very censurable. How do you account for this change?

Gaius. Were I to answer that the rights of conscience have of late years been more clearly understood, and that the sacred duty of benevolence, irrespective of the principles which men imbibe, has been more frequently enforced, I should so far speak the truth: and so far we have reason to congratulate the present age upon its improvement.

Crispus. Do you suppose there are other causes to which such a change may be attributed?

Gaius. I do. Scepticism, and a general indifference to religion appear to me to have succeeded the blind zeal and superstition of former ages. It has been observed, I think by Dr. Goodwin, on that remarkable phrase of the apostle Paul, *Ye walked according to the course of this world*, First, That there is a course which is general, and common to all ages and places, and which includes the gratifying of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, the laying up treasures on earth instead of heaven, &c. Secondly, That there is a course which is more particular, and which is incessantly varying, according to times, places, and circumstances. Like the tide, it is ever rolling, but in different directions. In one age or country it is this, in another that, and

in a third different from them both. The experimental religion, the early ages was a course of idolatry. In this Christian practuntil the days of Constantine, at which period the priesus ought ness found it impracticable in the civilized parts of the earse doclonger to support the Pagan throne. The leaders in the Roman empire resolved to become Christians; and great numbers, from various motives, followed their example. The tide had then changed its direction: the profession of Christianity was fashionable, was honourable, was the high road to preferment. Satan himself, if I may so speak, could now have no objection to turn Christian. The external profession of religion became splendid and pompous; but religion itself was gradually lost, and a system of ignorance, superstition, and persecution, was introduced in its place. For many centuries the course of this world (I speak of the European part of it) was a course of Popery; and so powerful was it that those who ventured to resist it did so at the expense of every thing that was dear to them on earth. In this direction it ran till the Reformation. Since that period there has been another turning of the tide. Several nations have become Protestant; and yet the course of this world goes on, and Satan has great influence among us. He has no objection to our laughing at superstition, provided that in any form we remain the slaves of sin. The world, of late years, has not directed its course so immediately towards superstition, as towards a criminal carelessness and Infidelity. Formerly the minds of men were so bent on uniformity in religion as to require it in *civil* society. Now they tend to the other extreme; and are for admitting any kind of sentiments even into *religious* society. In short, the propensity of the world in this day, is, to consider all religious principles whatever, and all forms of worship, even those which are of divine institution, as of little or no importance. It is from this cause, I am afraid, Crispus, and not merely from a better understanding of the rights of conscience, that a great part of the lenity of the present age arises.

Crispus. Be it so: yet the effect is friendly to mankind. If mutual forbearance among men arose from a good motive, it would

indeed be better for those who exercise it; but let it arise from what motive it may, it is certainly advantageous to society.

Gaius. Very true: but we should endeavour to have laudable conduct, if possible, arise from the purest motives, that it may be approved of God, as well as advantageous to men.

Crispus. But do you think we are to expect as much as this from the apostate race of Adam? In the apostle John's time the whole world was represented as lying in wickedness; and, in fact, it has been so ever since. Formerly its wickedness operated in a way of *intemperance:* now it works in a way of *indifference.* Of the two, does not the last seem to be the least injurious?

Gaius. It is indeed the least injurious to our property, our liberty, and our lives; but with regard to our spiritual interests it may be the reverse. Fashion, be it what it may, will always, in some degree at least, diffuse its influence through the minds of men, even of those who are truly religious. The intemperance of past ages gave to the temper of pious people, as well as others, a tinge of unchristian severity; and the indifference of the present time has, I fear, operated with equal power, though in a different manner. We ought to be thankful for our mercies; but at the same time we should take heed lest we be carried away by the course of this world.

Crispus. What evidence have we that religious people are influenced by a spirit of indifference.

Gaius. The crying up of one part of religion at the expense of another. You may often hear of practical religion as being every thing; and of speculative opinions (which is the fashionable name for doctrinal sentiments) as matters of very little consequence. Because they are not cognizable by the civil magistrate, they treat them as if they were of no account; and by opposing them to practical religion, the unwary are led to conclude that the one has no dependence on the other. The effect of this has been, that others, from an attachment to doctrinal principles, have run to a contrary extreme. They write and preach in favour of doctrines, and what are called the privileges of the gospel, to the neglect of subjects which immediately relate to practice. In

other circles you may hear *experience*, or experimental religion, extolled above all things, even at the expense of Christian practice and of sound doctrine. But really the religion of Jesus ought not thus to be mangled and torn to pieces. Take away the doctrines of the gospel and you take away the food of Christians. Insist on them alone, and you transform us into religious epicures. And you may as well talk of the pleasure you *experience* in eating when you are actually deprived of sustenance, or of the exquisite enjoyments of a state of total inactivity, as boast of experimental religion unconnected with doctrinal and practical godliness. The conduct of a man who walks with God appears to me to resemble that of the industrious husbandman, who eats that he may be strengthened to labour; and who by labour is prepared to enjoy his food.

Crispus. Well, you have opened a field for discussion. The next time we meet we may inquire farther into these subjects. Farewel.

DIALOGUE II.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH.

Crispus. IN our last conversation, Gaius, you made some remarks on the indifference of the present age, with regard to religious principles, which struck me forcibly: I should be glad to know what degree of importance you ascribe to the leading doctrines, or principles of Christianity.

Gaius. If you mean to ask, whether I consider the belief of them as essentially necessary to the enjoyment of good neighbourhood, or any of the just or kind offices of civil society, I should certainly answer in the negative. Benevolence is good will to men; and as far as good will to them can consist with the general good, we ought to exercise it towards them as men, whatever be their principles, or even their practices. But if your question relate purely to religion, I acknowledge that I consider a reception of the great doctrines of Christianity (in those who have opportunity of knowing them) as necessary to holiness, to happiness, and to eternal life.

Crispus. If your ideas be just, they afford room for very serious reflection. But will you not be subject to great difficulties in deciding what those truths are, and to what degree they must be believed? You cannot deny that even good men entertain different opinions of what truth is, nor that those who receive the truth receive it in very different degrees.

Gaius. The same objection might be made to the express decision of scripture, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* It might be said, You will find great difficulties in deciding what true holiness is, and what degree of it is necessary to eternal life; for you cannot deny that even good men entertain different opinions of what true holiness is, nor that those who are subjects of it possess it in very different degrees.

Crispus. And what would you answer to this objection?

Gaius. I should say, that no upright heart can be so in the dark respecting the nature of true holiness, as to make any essential mistake about it. Whether I can determine, with metaphysical accuracy, the different component parts of it, or not, yet, if I be a true Christian, I shall feel it, I shall possess it, I shall practise it. As to determine what degree of it will carry a man to heaven, that is not our business. We do not know to what extent divine mercy will reach in the forgiveness of sin; but this may be said, that a person may be assured he has no true holiness in him at all, who rests contented with any degree of it short of perfection.

Crispus. Will this answer apply to truth as well as to holiness?

Gaius. Why not? If the way of salvation be so plain, that *a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein*, what can it be but prejudice that renders the truth difficult to be understood? *He who does the will of God shall know of his doctrine.* Surely then I may say, that no one who is in a right temper of mind can be so in the dark respecting what truth is, as to make any essential mistake about it. Whether I can determine the question with accuracy, or not, yet, if I be a Christian, *the truth dwelleth in me.* As to the precise *degree* in which we must receive the truth in order to be saved, it is not our business to decide. But this is incontestable, that he who does not seek after the whole of revealed truth, and sit as a little child at the feet of his divine Instructor, the truth is not in him.

Crispus. But is it not easier to discover what holiness is, than what truth is?

Gaius. I grant that conscience assists in determining between right and wrong, which it does not in many things respecting truth and error. But if we were entirely on God's side, we should find the revealed dictates of truth as congenial to our hearts, as those of righteousness are to our consciences; and in that case the one would be as easily determined as the other.

Crispus. But is there not a difference between the importance of believing the truth of God, and that of complying with his commands?

Gaius. You would not think more favourably of a child who should discredit your testimony, than of one who should disobey your authority; and the same being who declares that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, has declared that *he who believeth not the record that God hath given of his Son, hath made him a liar*—that *he who believeth not shall be damned!*

Crispus. But should every error or mistake, to which fallible mortals are liable, be considered as unbelief, and as subjecting us to damnation?

Gaius. By no means. There is a specific difference between error and unbelief. The one is a misapprehension of what the divine testimony contains: the other supposes that we understand it, but yet discredit it. It is the latter, and not the former, that is threatened with damnation.

Crispus. Do you then suppose error to be innocent?

Gaius. The answer to this question must depend upon the cause from which it springs. If it arise from the want of natural power, or opportunity of obtaining evidence, it is mere mistake, and contains in it nothing of moral evil. But if it arise from prejudice, neglect, or an evil bias of heart, it is otherwise, and may endanger our eternal salvation.

Crispus. Will you be so good as to illustrate this distinction?

Gaius. Had David been engaged in the most wicked conspiracy when he fled to Ahimelech, and had Ahimelech in this circumstance given him *bread and a sword;* yet, if he *knew nothing of the conspiracy, less or more*, nor possessed any means of knowing it, his error would have been innocent, and he ought to have been acquitted. But had he possessed the means of knowledge, and from a secret disloyal bias neglected to use them, giving easy credit to those things which his heart approved, he would have deserved to die.

Crispus. Among human errors, we can distinguish between those which arise from the want of powers or opportunities, and such as spring from the evil bias of the heart?

Gaius. In many cases we certainly cannot, any more than we can fix the boundaries between light and shade; yet there are some things, and things of the greatest importance, that are

so plainly revealed. and of so holy a tendency, that we are taught by the scriptures themselves to impute an error concerning them not to the understanding only, but to the heart. *The fool hath said* IN HIS HEART, *there is no God.—Why do ye not understand my speech? Because* YE CANNOT HEAR MY WORDS.—*They stumbled at the stumbling-stone, being disobedient.*

Crispus. Have not all men their prejudices, the good as well as the wicked?

Gaius. As all men are the subjects of sin, undoubtedly they have. But as it does not follow, that because a good man is the subject of sin he may live in the practice of all manner of abominations, neither does it follow, that because he is the subject of criminal error he may err in the great concerns of eternal salvation. Good men have not only their *gold, silver*, and *precious stones;* but also their *wood, hay*, and *stubble*, which will be consumed, while they themselves are saved; nevertheless they are *all* represented as building upon *a right foundation.* He that errs with respect to *the foundation laid in Zion*, will, if God give not repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, err to his eternal overthrow.

Crispus. Does not this last species of error seem nearly related to unbelief?

Gaius. I conceive it to be so nearly related as to be its *immediate effect.* The heart leans to a system of falsehood, wishing it to be true; and what it wishes to be true, it is easily persuaded to think so. The first step in this progress describes the spirit of unbelief; the last, that of error: the one grows out of the other. Such a progress was exemplified in those persons described in the Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians: *They received not the love of the truth—believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness—therefore God gave them up to a reprobate mind, that they might believe a lie, and be damned.*

Crispus. Surely it is a serious thing in what manner we hear and receive the word of God!

Gaius. True; and I may add, in what manner we preach it too. Wo unto us if we teach mankind any other way of escape than that which the gospel reveals! Wo unto us if we preach not the gospel! If an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, let him be accursed!

DIALOGUE III.

ON THE CONNEXION BETWEEN DOCTRINAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND PRACTICAL RELIGION.

Crispus. IN our last interview, Gaius, we discoursed on the influence of truth as it respected our eternal salvation; we will now inquire if you please, into its influence on the holiness and happiness of Christians in the present state; or, in other words, into the connexion between doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion.

Gaius. Such an inquiry may convince us of the importance of each, and prevent our extolling one branch of religion at the expense of another.

Crispus. What do you mean by experimental religion?

Gaius. Experimental religion may be considered *generally* and *particularly:* in general, we mean by it the exercise of spiritual or holy affections, such as hope, fear joy, sorrow, and the like.

Crispus. And what relation do these things bear to divine truth?

Gaius. Under the agency of the Holy Spirit, they are its immediate effect. To render this matter evident, we need only inquire what have been the best seasons of our life, and our own remembrance will convince us that divine truth has been at the bottom of all these enjoyments which were truly solid and valuable.

Crispus. Some of the best times in my life have been those in which I have mourned over my sin with godly sorrow.

Gaius. Very well; this holy mourning arose from a sense of your own depravity, a truth plentifully taught in the Bible.

Crispus. I can remember, also, many joyful seasons when I have been in the lively exercise of faith and hope.

Gaius. Very good; but faith has truth for its object, and hope lays hold of a blessed immortality. Take away the doctrine of the cross and the promise of eternal life, and your faith and hope and joy would be annihilated.

Crispus. I have heard some persons exclaim against doctrinal preaching, as being dry and uninteresting: 'Give me,' say they, 'something spiritual and experimental.'

Gaius. Doctrines, it is allowed, may be so represented as to become dry and uninteresting; but scripture truth is not so in its own nature. The doctrines of the gospel are expressly called "spiritual things," which are spiritually discerned.

Crispus. Does not the term experience convey the idea of *proof* or *trial?*

Gaius. It does; and this is what I had in mind when I said the subject might be considered *particularly.* Though we use the term to express the exercise of spiritual affections in general, yet it is more accurate to apply it to that *proof* or *trial* which we make of divine things, while passing through the vicissitudes of life.

Crispus. Experimental knowledge, we commonly say in other things, is knowledge obtained by trial.

Gaius. Very well; it is the same in religion. There are many truths taught us in the divine word, and which we may be said to know by reading; but we do not know them experimentally till we have proved them true by having made the trial.

Crispus. Mention a few examples.

Gaius. We read in the scriptures of the doctrine of *human impotency*, and we think we understand it; but we never know this truth properly till we have had proof of it in our own experience. Farther: We read of the *corruption of the human heart*, and think in our early years that we believe it; but it is not till we have passed through a variety of changes, and had experience of its deceitful operations, that we perceive this truth as we ought. Again: We read much of the *goodness and faithfulness of God*, and we subscribe to each; but we never realize these truths till, having passed through those circumstances in which we have occa-

gion for them, they become imprinted upon our hearts. It is then that we feel their force and taste their sweetness: hence it is that *tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience.* It was, no doubt, a cheering truth, at all times, that God was the *portion* of his people; but never did they realize that truth so fully as when they were stripped of their earthly all, and carried into captivity. It was then that they sang, as taught by the prophet, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.*

Crispus. All experimental religion seems then to bear some relation to truth. If taken generally, for the exercise of spiritual affection, truth is here the *cause*, and these exercises are its immediate *effects.* If taken more particularly, for that proof or trial which we have of divine things as we pass through the vicissitudes of life, truth seems here to be the object of which we have experience.

Gaius. True; and the more we have of experimental religion, the more we shall feel ourselves attached to the great doctrines of the gospel, as the bread and water of life, from whence arises all our salvation and all our desire.

Crispus. Will not the connexion between doctrinal and experimental religion account for the ignorance which is attributed to carnal men with respect to divine things, as they do *not receive them, and cannot know them?*

Gaius. It will: nor is there any thing more surprising in it, than that a mercenary character should be a stranger to the joys of benevolence, or a dishonest man to the pleasures of a good conscience: they never experienced them, and therefore are utterly in the dark concerning them.

Crispus. Will you give me your thoughts of the influence of truth on holy practice?

Gaius. Perhaps there is no proposition but what has some *consequence* hanging upon it, and such consequence must be expected to correspond with the nature of the proposition. A truth in natural philosophy will be productive of a natural effect. Divine truth, when cordially imbibed, proves the seed of a godly life. For example: if there be a God that judgeth the earth, he is to be loved, feared, and adored. If man be a sinner before God, it

becomes him to lie low in self-abasement. If salvation be of grace, boasting is excluded. If we be bought with a price, we are not our own, and must not live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us, and rose again. Religious sentiments are called *principles*, because when received in the love of them, they become the springs of holy action.

Crispus. Do the scriptures confirm this view of things?

Gaius. You must have read such passages as the following:—*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.—Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.—Grace and peace be multiplied unto you, through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.—Speak thou the things which* BECOME *sound doctrine.* I suppose our Lord meant something like this when he told the woman of Samaria, *The water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life:* that is, the gospel or doctrine that I preach, when cordially imbibed, shall become a well-spring of heavenly joy and holy activity, rising higher and higher till it terminate in everlasting blessedness.

Crispus. What inference may be drawn from all this?

Gaius. If God has joined these things together, let no man, whether preacher or hearer, attempt to put them asunder.

Crispus. Is it proper to distinguish between doctrinal and experimental religion?

Gaius. If by those terms it were only meant to distinguish between the truth to be known, and a spiritual knowledge of it, they are very proper; but if the latter be considered as existing without the former, it is a great mistake.

DIALOGUE IV.

ON THE MORAL CHARACTER OF GOD.

Crispus. YOUR late observations on the importance of truth, and the connexion between doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion, have excited in my mind an increasing desire after a more particular knowledge of the great doctrines of Christianity.

Gaius. I am glad to hear it; and if it be in my power to afford you any additional light on those interesting subjects, it will give me great pleasure.

Crispus. What do you consider as the first and most fundamental principle of true religion?

Gaius. Unless I except the existence of God, perhaps none is more deserving of those epithets than his *moral character.*

Crispus. What do you mean by the moral character of God?

Gaius. The divine perfections have been distinguished into *natural* and *moral.* By the former we understand those perfections which express his greatness: such are his wisdom, power, majesty, omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, eternity, immensity, &c. By the latter, those which express his essential goodness: such are his justice, his mercy, his veracity, or, in one word, his HOLINESS. These last are the peculiar glory of the divine nature, and constitute what is meant by his moral character.

Crispus. Are not *all* the attributes of Deity essential to the character of an all perfect Being?

Gaius. They are; but yet the glory of his natural perfections depends upon their being united with those which are moral. The ideas of wisdom, power, or immutability, convey nothing lovely to the mind, but the reverse, unless they be connected with righteousness, goodness, and veracity. Wisdom without holiness would be serpentine subtlety; power would be tyranny; and immutability annexed to a character of such qualities would be the curse and terror of the universe.

Crispus. But as God is possessed of one as well as the other, they *all* contribute to his glory.

Gaius. True; and it affords matter of inexpressible joy to all holy intelligences, that a Being of such rectitude and goodness is possessed of power equal to the desire of his heart, of wisdom equal to his power, and that he remains through eternal ages immutably the same. Power and wisdom in such hands are the blessing of the universe.

Crispus. Is the above distinction of the divine perfections, into natural and moral, applicable to any useful purposes?

Gaius. It will assist us in determining the nature of that most fundamental of all moral principles—*the love of God.* If holiness constitute the loveliness of the divine nature, this must be the most direct and immediate object of holy affection. True love to God will always bear a primary regard to that which above all other things renders him a lovely Being.

Crispus. I knew a lecturer on philosphy, who, by discoursing on the wisdom and power of God as displayed in the immensity of creation, was wrought up into a rapture of apparent devotion, and his audience with him; and yet in less than an hour's time, after leaving the room, he was heard to curse and swear, as was his usual manner of conversation.

Gaius. You might find great numbers of this description. They consider the Divine Being as a great genius, as a fine architect, and survey his works with admiration; but his moral excellence, which constitutes the chief glory of his nature, has no charms in their eyes. But if that which constitutes the chief glory of his nature have no charms in their eyes, all the admiration which they may bestow upon the productions of his wisdom and power, will amount to nothing: *the love of God is not in them.*

Crispus. You consider the moral character of God as a *fundamental* principle in religion; what then are those principles which are founded upon it?

Gaius. The equity of the divine law, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the ruined state of man as a sinner, with the necessity of an Almighty Saviour, and a free salvation.

Crispus. Will you oblige me by pointing out the connexion of these principles?

Gaius. If there be infinite loveliness in the moral character of God, then it is right and equitable that we should love him with all our hearts; which, with a subordinate love to our neighbour as ourselves, is the sum of what the divine law requires. And in proportion to the loveliness of the divine character must be the hatefulness of aversion to him, and rebellion against him; hence follows the exceeding sinfulness of sin. And if sin be odious in its nature, it must be dangerous in its consequences, exposing us to the curse of the divine law, the just and everlasting displeasure of a holy God. Finally: If, as rebels against the moral government of God, we be all in a ruined and perishing condition, we need a Deliverer who shall be able to save to the utmost, whose name shall be called the *Mighty God*, and a salvation without money and without price, that shall be suited to our indigent condition.

Crispus. Is not the moral excellence of the divine character admitted by great numbers who reject these principles, which you say arise from it?

Gaius. I suppose no person who admits the being of a God, would expressly deny the excellence of his moral character; but it is easy to observe that those who deny the foregoing principles, either discover no manner of delight in it, but are taken up, like your *philosophical lecturer*, in admiring the productions of God's natural perfections, or else are employed in moddelling his character according to their own depraved ideas of excellence. Being under the influence of self-love, they see no loveliness but in proportion as he may subserve their happiness; hence the justice of God in the punishment of sin is kept out of view, and what they call his goodness and mercy (but which, in fact, are no other than connivance at sin, and indifference to the glory of his government) are exalted in its place. A Being thus qualified may be easily adored; it is not God however that is worshipped, but an imaginary being created after the image of depraved men.

Crispus. To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent; in other words, to know the true glory of the Lawgiver and the Saviour, seems to be of the highest importance.

Gaius. True; the former is absolutely necessary to the latter, and both to *grace and peace being multiplied* here, and to our enjoyment of eternal life hereafter.

DIALOGUE V.

ON THE FREE-AGENCY OF MAN.

Crispus. OUR last conversation, on the moral character of God, has led me, Gaius, to desire your thoughts on the nature of man, as a subject of moral government.

Gaius. This is, no doubt, a very interesting subject. As we all feel ourselves accountable beings, and must all give account of ourselves another day, it becomes us to know ourselves, and the nature of those powers with which the great Creator has invested us.

Crispus. Do you consider man as a free-agent?

Gaius. Certainly; to deny this, would be to deny that we are accountable to the God that made us. Necessarians and anti-necessarians have disputed wherein free-agency consists; but the thing itself is allowed on both sides.

Crispus. Suppose then I were to change the the question; and ask, wherein does free-agency consist?

Gaius. I should answer, *In the power of following the inclination.*

Crispus. And is it in our power in all cases to follow our inclinations?

Gaius. No: there is such a thing as involuntary motion. By the exercise of an absolute force upon our bodies we may be compelled to move against our inclination, and to forbear to move according to our desire; but in these cases we are not accountable beings.

Crispus. Some have thought man to be a free-agent in natural things, but not as to things moral and spiritual.

Gaius. This is the same as supposing him accountable only for those things in which there is neither good nor evil; and this, if

true, would prove that we are not subjects of moral government, and shall never be called to give account of either good or evil. Besides, it is a fact that we as freely pursue our inclinations in spiritual as in natural things; we as freely yield ourselves to be the servants of sin, or of God, as ever we chose to eat, drink, or walk.

Crispus. Then you think we are free-agents in all those matters which are inseparably connected with eternal salvation.

Gaius. Certainly: if otherwise, we should be equally incapable of rejecting, as of accepting, the gospel way of salvation.

Crispus. And do you suppose we are free-agents, with respect to keeping or breaking the divine law?

Gaius. I do: we are only required to love God with all our *strength;* or to consecrate all our *powers* to his service, be they great or small.

Crispus. Why then do we not keep the law perfectly?

Gaius. Because of the depravity of our hearts. If our hearts, or inclinations, were wholly on the side of God, we should feel no difficulty in keeping it; on the contrary, it would be our meat and drink.

Crispus. But if our hearts be deprived, and we be enslaved to sin, how can we be said to be free?

Gaius. We cannot be morally free; but moral slavery, any more than moral liberty, has nothing to do with free-agency. The reason is, in this case there is no force opposed to the agent's own will.

Crispus. I have often heard it asserted, that it does not signify whether the incapacity lies in the will, or in something distinct from the will. 'If we cannot do good,' say they, 'we cannot, and in that case we are not free agents."

Gaius. Those who speak thus of free-agency, must mean to include in it a freedom from the influence of motives; a power of acting with or contrary to the prevailing inclination; or, at least a power to change the inclination.

Crispus. Yes; I have heard it observed, that it amounts to nothing to say we have the power of following the prevailing

inclination ; unless we have also the power of coun[illegible]h the lan-
changing it. [illegible]t ; and

Gaius. If, by *amounting to nothing*, they mean that we a[illegible] how hereby any more qualified to be our own deliverers from the thra[illegible]dom of sin, than if we had no free-agency, but must be indebted wholly to sovereign and efficacious grace for it, I admit the consequences. Little however as they made of this idea of free-agency, I might reply, it is all that they themselves can conceive of, and all that can be ascribed to any being in heaven, earth, or hell.

Crispus. How does this appear ?

Gaius. No one can conceive of a power of voluntarily acting against the prevailing inclination ; for the thing itself is a contradiction : and a power of changing it is no less absurd. If a person go about to change his prevailing inclination, he must, in so doing, be either involuntary, or voluntary. If the former, this can be no exercise of free-agency ; if the latter, he must have two opposite prevailing inclinations at the same time ; which is a contradiction. And, if it were not a contradiction, he still does no more than follow his inclination ; namely, his virtuous inclination, which he is supposed to possess, to have his vicious inclination changed. If freedom from the influence of motives, or power to change one's inclination, be essential to free-agency, the divine Being himself is not free. God, as all must allow, possesses an immutable determination to do what is right, and cannot, in the least degree, or for a single moment, incline to the contrary. His conduct is necessarily and invariably expressive of the infinite rectitude of his will. The same, in a degree, might be said of holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. So far from being free from the influence of motives, or having a power to change the prevailing inclination of their hearts, those motives, which, by reason of the depravity of our natures, have but little effect upon us, have full influence upon them, and constantly determine them to the most ardent pursuit of righteousness.

Crispus. And yet you say they are free-agents ?

Gaius. If God, angels, and saints in heaven, be not free-agents, who are ?

Crispus. But this is moral *liberty*.

Gaius. True; but the same reasoning will apply to moral slavery. If an unalterable bias of mind to good does not destroy free-agency, neither does an unalterable bias of mind to evil. Satan is as much a free-agent as Gabriel, and as much accountable to God for all he does.

Crispus. Some suppose man to have lost his free-agency by the fall.

Gaius. Say rather, man has lost his moral *rectitude* by the fall. All that was entrusted in his hands was lost. But we might as well say he had lost his reason, his conscience, or his memory, as to say he had lost his free-agency; and this would be supposing him to have lost his intellectual nature, and to have become literally a brute.

Crispus. Wherein does your notion of free-agency differ from the Arminian notion of free-will?

Gaius. The Arminian notion of free-will is what I have all along been opposing; the one consists merely in the power of following our prevailing inclination; the other in a supposed power of acting contrary to it, or at least of changing it. The one predicates freedom of the man, the other of a faculty in man; which Mr. Locke, though an anti-necessarian, explodes as an absurdity. The one goes merely to render us accountable beings; the other arrogantly claims a part, yea, the very turning point of salvation. According to the latter, we need only certain helps or assistances, granted to men in common, to enable us to choose the path of life; but according to the former, our hearts being by nature wholly depraved we need an Almighty and invincible power to renew them, otherwise our free agency would only accelerate our everlasting ruin.

Crispus. You suppose, I imagine that the invincible operations of the Holy Spirit do not interfere with our free-agency?

Gaius. Certainly: if the temper of the heart does not affect it, neither can any change upon that temper. It affects free-agency no more than it affects reason, conscience, or memory: man all along feels himself at liberty to follow what inclination dictates; and, therefore, is a free-agent.

Crispus. Does your notion of free-agency agree with the language of the apostle Paul: *The good that I would, I do not; and the evil that I would not, that I do.—To will, is present; but how to perform that which is good, I find not?*

Gaius. I think we ought to distinguish between a willingness that is habitual and general, and one that is universal and entire. Paul, and every real Christian, generally and habitually wills to be holy, as God is holy; but this volition is not universal and entire. It is not so perfect nor intense as that there is no remainder of indolence, obstinacy, or carnality. Perfection is the object approved, or rather, desired; but that approbation or desire is not perfect in degree: a perfect degree of willingness would be perfect holiness.

Crispus. Then you do not suppose the apostle to mean, that sin operated absolutely, and in every sense, against his will?

Gaius. I do not: it was certainly against the ruling principle of his soul; but to suppose that any sin can be strictly and absolutely involuntary in its operations, is contrary to every dictate of common sense.

DIALOGUE VI.

ON THE GOODNESS OF THE MORAL LAW.

Crispus. OUR two last conversations on the moral character of God and the free-agency of man, have, I hope been of use to me. I have been thinking since of the great rule of God's government—the moral law, as being the *image* of his moral character.

Gaius. Your idea is just: God is LOVE. All his moral attributes are but the different modifications of love, or love operating in different ways. Vindictive justice itself is the love of order, and is exercised for the welfare of beings in general; and the moral law, the sum of which is love, expresses the very heart of him that framed it.

Crispus. I have been thinking of love as the band which unites all holy intelligences to God, and one another; as that in the moral system, which the law of attraction is in the system of nature.

Gaius. Very good: while the planets revolve round the sun as their central point, and are supremely attracted by it, they each have a subordinate influence upon the other: all attract, and are attracted by others in their respective orbits; yet no one of these subordinate attractions interferes with the grand attractive influence of the sun, but acts rather in perfect concurrence with it. Under some such idea we may conceive of supreme love to God, and subordinate love to creatures.

Crispus. Among the planets, if I mistake not, the attractive power of each body corresponds with the quantity of matter it possesses, and its proximity to the others.

Gaius. True: and though in general we are required to love our neighbour as ourselves, yet there are some persons, on ac

account of their more immediate connexion with us, whom we are allowed, and even obliged, to love more than the rest.

Crispus. If we could suppose the planets endued with intelligence, and any one of them, weary of revolving round the sun, should desert its orbit, assume a distinct centership of its own, and draw others off with it, what would be the consequence ?

Gaius. Anarchy and confusion, no doubt, with regard to the system ; and cold and darkness and misery, with regard to those which had deserted it.

Crispus. And is not this a near resemblance to the condition of apostate angels and men ?

Gaius. Doubtless it is; and your similitude serves to illustrate the evil of sin, as it affects the harmony of the divine government in general, and the happiness of each individual in particular.

Crispus. Is there not a general notion in the minds of men, that the moral law is too strict and rigid for man in his fallen state ?

Gaius. There is ; and some who ought to know better, have compared its requirements to those of an Egyptian task-master, who demanded bricks without straw ; and have recommended the gospel as being at variance with it. Many who would be thought the greatest, if not the only friends of Christ, have made no scruple of professing their hatred to *Moses,* as they term the moral law.

Crispus. But does not the precept of the moral law require what is beyond our strength ?

Gaius. If, by strength, you mean to include inclination, I grant it does ; but if, by strength, you mean what is literally and properly so called, it requires us even now but to love God *with all our strength.* It is not in the want of strength, literally and strictly speaking, that our insufficiency to keep the divine law consists, but in the want of a holy temper of mind ; and this, instead of being any excuse, or requiring an abatement of the law, is the very essence of that wherein blame consists.

Crispus. I have thought it might serve to show the goodness of the divine law if we were to suppose it reversed. Suppose, in-

stead of loving, God should require us to hate him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbour likewise ?

Gaius. This would require us to be both wicked and miserable ; and the idea is sufficient to shock any person of common sense.

Crispus. But suppose God were to require us to love him and one another, only *in a less degree ?*

Gaius. That would be the same as requiring *a part* of our affection, and allowing us to be of a divided heart. Our powers cannot be indifferent : If they are not applied to the love of God and man, they will be applied to something opposite, even the love of the world. But as the love of the world is enmity to God, if this were allowed, it were the same as allowing men, in a degree, to be at enmity with him and each other ; that is, to be wicked and miserable.

Crispus. I have several more questions to ask you on this important subject, but shall defer them to another opportunity.

Gaius. Farewell then, Crispus : God grant that this divine law may be found written upon each of our hearts !

Crispus. Amen !

DIALOGUE VII.

ON ANTINOMIANISM.

Crispus. OUR conversation on the moral law has led me to think of some other subjects nearly related to it. I have observed, that many people have been called Antinomians; yet very few call themselves so. What is antinomianism?

Gaius. Enmity, or opposition, to the law of God.

Crispus. Are not all men then by nature Antinomians?

Gaius. I believe they are; for the *carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed an be.*

Crispus. By this passage, it should seem that God and his law are so united, that a non-subjection to the one is enmity to the other.

Gaius. How should it be otherwise? The sum of the law is love; and in this case, not to love is to be enmity.

Crispus. All men, however, do not profess to be at enmity, either with God, or his law.

Gaius. True; but many men are very different, you know, from what they profess to be, and even from what they conceive of themselves.

Crispus. I can easily conceive of various wicked characters being enemies to the divine law, whatever they may say in its favour.

Gaius. And have you not observed, that all the different species of false religion agree in this particular?

Crispus. I do not know whether I have sufficiently—To what do you refer?

Gaius. I refer to the different forms in which mankind quiet their consciences, and cherish their hopes, while the love of

God and man are neglected. What is superstition, but the substitution of something ceremonial; something that may be done consistently with a heart at enmity with God, in the place of that which is moral? the tithing of mint and cummin, and various things of the kind, were much more agreeable to the *ancient Pharisees*, than *judgment*, *mercy*, *and the love of God*. The *modern Jews* are greatly attached to ceremony; but the shocking indevotion which distinguishes their worship, and the mercenary spirit which too generally pervades their dealings, sufficiently discover their aversion from that law of which they make their boast. Impiety and cruelty are prominent features in the faces of our *modern Heathens*, with all their refinement; and the same is observable in others who are less refined: gods and weapons of war are to be found in the most *barbarous Heathen nations*. Ignorant as they are, they have all learned to violate the two great branches of the moral law.* Beads, and pilgrimages, and relics, and all the retinue of *Popish* ceremonies are but substitutes for the love of God and our neighbour. The formal round of ceremonies attended to by *pharisaical professors* of all communities is the same. Let an attentive reader examine the system of Socinus, and even of Arminius, and he will find them agreed in opposing the native equity and goodness of the moral law. The former claims it as a matter of justice, that allowances be made for human error and imperfection; and the latter, though it speaks of *grace*, and the *mediation of Christ*, and considers the gospel as a new, mild, and remedial law, yet would accuse you of making the Almighty a tyrant, if this grace were withheld, and the terms of the moral law strictly adhered to. All these, as well as that species of false religion which has more generally gone by the name of *antinomianism*, you see, are agreed in this particular. This last, which expressly disowns the moral law as a rule of life, sets up the gospel in opposition to it; and substitutes visionary enjoyments as the evidence of an interest in gospel blessings, in place of a conformity to its precepts.—This last, I say, though it professes to be greatly at

* This reflection was made by a friend of mine on visiting *The British Museum*, and seeing various curiosities from Heathen countries; among which were a number of idols and instruments of war.

variance with several of the foregoing schemes, is nearer akin to them than its advocates are willing to admit. If the love of God and man be left out of our religion, it matters but little what we substitute in its place. Whether it go by the name of reason or superstition, religious ceremony or evangelical liberty, all is delusion; all arises from the same source, and tends to the same issue. Good men may in a degree have been beguiled, and for a time carried away with these winds of false doctrine; but I speak of *things*, and their natural tendencies, not of persons. In short, we may safely consider it as a criterion by which any doctrine may be tried: if it be unfriendly to the moral law, it is not of God, but proceedeth from the father of lies.

Crispus. What you have observed seems very clear and very affecting: but I have heard it remarked, that some of these systems naturally attach their adherents to the works of the law.

Gaius. This is very true; but there is a wide difference between an attachment *to the law*, and an attachment *to the works of the law* as the ground of eternal life; as much as between the spirit of a faithful servant, who loves his master, loves his family, loves his service, and never wishes to go out free; and that of a slothful servant, who though he hates his master, hates his family, hates his employment, and never did him any real service, yet has the presumption to expect his reward.

Crispus. This distinction seems of great importance, as it serves to reconcile those scriptures which speak in favour of the law, and those which speak against an attachment to the works of it.

Gaius. It is the same distinction, only in other words, which has commonly been made respecting the law as a rule of life, and as a covenant.

Crispus. Will you be so obliging as to point out a few of the consequences of denying the law to be the rule of life, and representing it as at variance with the gospel?

Gaius. First: This doctrine directly militates against all those scriptures which speak in favour of the moral law, and afford us an honourable idea of it; such as the following:—*O how I love thy law!—The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and*

good.—I come not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.—Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid; Yea, we establish the law.—I delight in the law of God after the inner man.—I with my mind serve the law of God. Secondly: This doctrine reflects upon God himself for having given a law under one dispensation, which is at variance with a gospel given under another. Thirdly: It justifies the sinner in the breach of the law. There can be no evil in sin, but in proportion to the goodness of that law of which it is a transgression. Fourthly: It is in direct opposition to the life and death of the Saviour. By the former he obeyed its precepts, by the latter endured its penalty, and by both declared it to be holy, just, and good. Every reflection, therefore, upon the moral law, is a reflection upon Christ. Fifthly: It strikes at the root of all personal religion, and opens the flood-gates to iniquity. Those who imbibe this doctrine talk of being *sanctified in Christ*, in such a manner as to supercede all personal and progressive sanctification in the believer.

DIALOGUE VIII.

ON HUMAN DEPRAVITY.

Crispus. I thank you, Gaius, for your observations on various important subjects; and now, if agreeable, I should be glad of your thoughts on the painful but interesting subject of human depravity.

Gaius. An interesting subject indeed! Perhaps there is no one truth in the scriptures, of a more fundamental nature with respect to the gospel-way of salvation. I never knew a person verge toward the Arminian, the Arian the Socinian, or the Antinomian schemes, without first entertaining diminutive notions of human depravity, or blame-worthiness.

Crispus. Wherein do you conceive depravity to consist?

Gaius. In the opposite to what is required by the divine law.

Crispus. The sum of the divine law is love; the essence of depravity then must consist in the want of love to God and our neighbour; or in setting up some other object, or objects, to the exclusion of them.

Gaius. True; and perhaps it will be found that all the objects set up in competition with God and our neighbour may be reduced to one, and that is *self.* Private self-love seems to be the root of depravity, the grand succedaneum in human affections to the love of God and man. Self-admiration, self-will, and self-righteousness are but different modifications of it. Where this prevails, the creature assumes the place of the Creator, and seeks his own gratification, honour, and interest, as the ultimate end of all his actions. Hence, when the Apostle describes men under a variety of wicked characters, the first link in the chain is—*lovers of their ownselves.*

Hence also the first and grand lesson in the Christian school is—to *deny ourselves.*

Crispus. Almost all evangelical writers, I believe, have considered men as utterly depraved; and that not by education, or any accidental cause or causes, but by nature, as they are born into the world.

Gaius. They have. This was manifestly the doctrine generally embraced at the Reformation, and which has been maintained by the advocates for salvation by sovereign grace, in every age.

Crispus. Yet one should think, if men were *totally* depraved, they would be all, and always alike wicked.

Gaius. If by total depravity you mean that men are so corrupt as to be incapable of adding sin to sin, I know of no person who maintains any such sentiment. All I mean by the term is this: That the human heart is by nature totally destitute of love to God, or love to man as the creature of God, and consequently is destitute of all true virtue. A being may be utterly destitute of good, and therefore totally depraved (such, it will be allowed, is Satan,) and yet be capable of adding iniquity to iniquity without end.

Crispus. I should be glad if you would point out a few of the principal evidences on which the doctrine of human depravity is founded.

Gaius. The principal evidences that strike me at this time may be drawn from the four following sources: scripture testimony, history, observation, and experience.

Crispus. What do you reckon the principal *scripture testimonies* on this subject?

Gaius Those passages which expressly teach it; such as the following:—*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.—God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. Every one of them is gone back, they are altogether become filthy: There is none that doeth good, no not one.—Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no not one. Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the ways of peace have they not known. There is no fear of*

God before their eyes. The carnal mind is enmity against God for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.—The whole world lieth in wickedness.—Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past. in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.—Those passages also which teach the necessity of regeneration. If men were not essentially depraved, a reformation might suffice; but if all be corrupt, the whole fabric must be taken down: *Old things must pass away, and all things must become new.*

Crispus. What evidence do you derive from *history* in favour of this doctrine?

Gaius. If our limits would allow us to survey the history of mankind, from their first apostacy to this day, the amount would go to prove what the scriptures affirm—that *the whole earth lieth in wickedness.* The circumstances and changes among mankind have been various. They have greatly differed in their manners, customs, and religions: one age has established what another has demolished; in some ages they have been enveloped in ignorance, in others irradiated by science; but in all ages, and in all circumstances, they have been alienated from the love of God.

Crispus. The history of the world, though it appear to favour the doctrine in question, yet seems to be too large and complicate an object to be viewed distinctly. Suppose you were to single out one nation as a specimen of the whole.

Gaius. Very well; and suppose this one nation to have been attended above all others with mercies and judgments, divine laws, special interpositions, and every thing that could have any tendency to meliorate the hearts of men.

Crispus. You seem to have in view the nation of Israel.

Gaius. I have; and the rather because I consider this nation as designed of God to afford a specimen of human nature. The Divine Being singled them out, crowned them with goodness, strengthened them with the tenderest encouragements, awed them with the most tremendous threatnings, wrought his wonderful works before their eyes, and inspired his servants to give us a faithful history of their character. I need not repeat what this

character is. Excepting the conduct of a few godly people among them, which, being the effect of divine grace, argues nothing against the doctrine in question, it is a series of rebellion and continued departures from the living God.

Crispus. What additional evidence in favour of this doctrine do you derive from observation.

Gaius. In looking into the composition of the human mind, we observe various passions and propensities ; and if we inspect their operations, we shall see in each a marked aversion from the true God, and from all true religion. For example : Man loves to *think*, and cannot live without thinking ; but he does not love to think of God ; *God is not in all his thoughts.* Man delights in *activity*, is perpetually in motion ; but has no heart to act for God. Men take pleasure in *conversation*, and are never more cheerful than when engaged in it ; but if God and religion be introduced, they are usually struck dumb, and discover an inclination to drop the subject. Men greatly delight in hearing and telling *news ;* but if the glorious news of the gospel be sounded in their ears, it frequently proves as unwelcome as Paul's preaching at Athens. In fine, Man feels the necessity of *a God ;* but has no relish for the true God. There is a remarkable instance of this in the conduct of those nations planted by the king of Assyria in the cities of Samaria. They were consumed by wild beasts, and considered it as an expression of displeasure from the *god of the land.* They wished to become acquainted with him, that they might please him. An Israelitish priest is sent to teach them the manner of the god of the land. But when he taught them the fear of Jehovah, his character and worship do not seem to have suited their taste ; for each nation preferred the worship of its own gods. 2 Kings xvii.

Crispus. What evidence do you draw in favour of this doctrine from *experience*?

Gaius. The best of men whose lives are recorded in holy scripture, have always confessed and lamented the depravity of their nature ; and I never knew a character truly penitent, but he was convinced of it. It is a strong presumption against the contrary doctrine, that the light-minded and dissipated part of man-

kind are generally its advocates ; while the humble, the serious, and the godly, as generally acknowledge, with the Apostle, that, *fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, they were by nature Children of wrath even as others.*

Crispus. I have several more inquiries to make on this interesting subject, which I must defer till another opportunity.

DIALOGUE IX.

ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

Gaius. I think you said, Crispus, at the close of our last conversation, on the depravity of Human Nature, that you had several questions to ask upon the subject.

Crispus. I did so. No subject has appeared to me more interesting, or more pregnant with important consequences. The doctrine of total depravity, according to your own explication of it, seems to imply, that all that which is called in virtue in unregenerate men, is not virtue in reality, and contains nothing in it pleasing to God; is no part of their duty towards him; but, on the contrary, is of the very nature of sin.

Gaius. And what if these consequences were admitted?

Crispus. I have not been used to consider things in so strong a light. I have generally thought that men are *universally* depraved; that is, that all their powers, thoughts, volitions, and actions, are *tainted* with sin; but it never struck me before, that this depravity was *total*, so total as that all their actions are of the very nature of sin.

Gaius. You must admit that this was the doctrine embraced by the English Reformers. They tell us that "Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his spirit, are not pleasing to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the school authors say,) deserve grace of congruity: Yea, rather for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."*

Crispus. True; but I should have suspected that they had carried things rather to an extreme. There is something so awful in the thought of a human life being one *unmixed* course of

* Article XIII of the Church of England.

evil; so contrary to what appears in numberless chracters, whom we cannot but respect for many amiable qualities, though they do not appear to be the subjects of true religion; in a word, so discouraging to every effort for the attainment of any virtue short of real godliness, that my heart revolts at the idea.

Gaius. I am willing to examine every difficulty you can advance. Before you raise your objections, however, your first inquiry, I think, ought to be, *Is it true?*

Crispus. Very well; proceed then to state your evidences.

Gaius. The following are the principal evidences which occur to me at present: (1.) All those passages of scripture cited in the last dialogue, which expressly teach it; declaring that *every imagination*, purpose, or desire, *of man's heart, is* ONLY *evil* CONTINUALLY—that *there is none that seeketh after God—every one of them is gone back—they are altogether become filthy—there is none that doeth good, no not one.* (2.) Those scriptures which declare the utter impossibility of carnal men doing any thing to please God; such as—*Without faith it is impossible to please God. To be carnally minded is death—because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.** If they that are in the flesh did any part of their duty towards God; or if what they did were good and virtuous in his sight, so far as it goes; their minds would so far be subject to the law of God: and being such, they might and would please him; for God is not a capricious or hard master, but is pleased with righteousness wherever he sees it. (3.) Those scriptures which speak of the whole of goodness or virtue as comprehended in *love;* namely, the love of God and our neighbour:—*Love is the fulfilling of the law.—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.* If the love of God supremely, and the love of creatures subordinately, comprise the whole of virtue, where these are wanting, virtue can have no existence. And that these are wanting in all ungodly men is evident, for *they have*

* See this passage clealy illustrated, and the truth contained in it fully enforced, in two pieces in the *Evangelical Magazine* for August and December, 1793, pp. 72. 239.

not the love of God in them ; and where God is not loved supremely, creatures cannot be loved in subordination to him ; but are either disregarded, or regarded on some other account : such love therefore, has no virtue in it, but is of the nature of sin. (4.) Those scriptures which teach the necessity of *regeneration* to eternal life :—*Ye must be born again.—Except a man be born of water, and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.—If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away, and all things are become new.* If there were any degree of virtue in the carnal heart, or any thing that was pleasing to God, it might be cultivated and increased ; and in this case, old things need not pass away and all things become new. Regeneration would be unnecessary ; a mere reformation, or an improvement of principles already inherent in man, would suffice. (5.) Those scriptures which promise the blessings of salvation and eternal life to every degree of righteousness or true virtue :—*All things work together for good to them that* LOVE GOD.—*Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all them that* OBEY HIM.—*He that* DOTH RIGHTEOUSNESS *is righteous. They that have* DONE GOOD *shall rise to the resurrection of life.—He that giveth a cup of cold water to a disciple,* IN THE NAME OF A DISCIPLE, (or because he belongs to Christ,) *shall have a disciple's reward.* In these passages we must observe that God's gracious declarations and promises are not made to this or that *degree* of goodness, but to every, or any degree of it : or rather, it is not the degree, but the nature of it that is considered in the divine promise. From hence we may certainly conclude, that unregenerate men have not the least degree of real goodness in them, or of any thing that is pleasing to God.

Crispus. I must acknowledge there is much apparent force in these arguments, and I am not at present sufficiently prepared to encounter them ; but I have some strong objections in my mind, which I wish to have thoroughly discussed

Gaius. With all my heart. Consider, Crispus, the force of what has been already alleged, and let me have your objections in the strongest light in which you are capable of arranging them.

Crispus. I will endeavour to comply with your advice, and he result of it shall be the subject of a future discussion.

LETTER I.

ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

[Crispus to Gaius.]

C——n, July 3. 1794.

My dear Friend,

As providence has lately, by removing my situation, deprived me of the pleasure of your company, I hope that defect may be in some measure supplied by writing. The subject of our two last interviews, on *the total depravity of human nature*, has much occupied my attention. I feel it to be a *fundamental* principle in religion; it is that, take it how we will, on which almost all other principles are founded. I have objections to your ideas of this doctrine, I confess; and you desired me when we were last together, to place them in the strongest light I was able. The principal things which have hitherto occurred to me may be reduced to the following heads:—

First: The scriptures appear to speak with approbation of some actions performed by unregenerate men, and even God himself is represented as rewarding them. It appears to have been thus in the case of Ahab, when he humbled himself; and the Ninevites when they repented at the preaching of Jonah; as also in the case of the young Ruler in the Gospel, whom our Lord is represented to have loved; and the discreet scribe whom he assured that he was *not far from the kingdom of heaven.* Now, if all the actions of unregenerate men are of the nature of sin, these must have been so; but if these were so, how are we to account for the favourable manner in which they were treated?

Secondly: The common sense of mankind unites to attribute many excellencies and amiable qualities to persons whom, never-

theless, we are obliged, from other parts of their conduct, to consider as destitute of true religion. Is it not right and amiable, even in the sight of God, so far as it goes, that children are dutiful to their parents, and parents affectionate to their children; that men are obedient to the laws, benevolent to the poor, faithful in their connexions, and just in their dealings? And is it not evident to universal observation that these are things which may be found in characters who, nevertheless, by other parts of their conduct, evince themselves to be strangers to true religion?

Thirdly: Every man is possessed of *conscience*, which bears witness to him in unnumbered instances of what is right and wrong; and this witness is known to have considerable influence even on wicked men, so as to impel them to the performance of many good actions, and to deter them from others which are evil.

Fourthly: If all the actions of unregenerate men be not only mixed with sin, but are in their own nature sinful, then whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they sin against God: but eating and drinking, in moderation, appear to be mere natural actions, and to have in them neither moral good, nor moral evil.

Lastly: If all the actions of unregenerate men be in their own nature sinful, surely there can be no ground for a ministerial address, no motive by which to exhort them to cease from evil and to do good; nor any encouragement afforded them to comply with any thing short of what is spiritually good. It has been very common for even the advocates of salvation by free grace to distinguish between moral virtue and true religion: the former they have allowed to exist in a degree in unregenerate men, and have thought it their duty to encourage it, though at the same time they have insisted on the necessity of what is superior to it. But your ideas of total depravity would go to destroy this distinction, and render what has been usually called moral virtue, no virtue. "This," I remember an ingenious writer once observed, "is not orthodoxy, but extravagance." For my part, I would nor speak so strong; yet I cannot but say, you seem to carry things to an extreme. I am free to own, however, that I feel the difficulty of answering what you advanced in the last dialogue. Every truth is doubtless

consistent with other truths. Happy should I be to obtain satisfactory and consistent views on this important subject.

Some religious people to whom I have repeated the substance of our conversations, do not at all appear to be interested by them. They seem to me to be contented with a confused and superficial view of things. I wish I could transfer my feelings to them. Did they but know the worth of just sentiments in religion, they would think no labour too great to obtain them. They seem to be averse to the pain which accompanies a state of hesitation and suspense, and therefore decline to examine all those difficult subjects which would produce it. But then they are of course equally unaccompanied with the pleasure which arises from the solution of these difficulties, and from obtaining clear and satisfactory views of divine subjects. Surely it *were criminal indolence* in us as well as *meanness*, if, rather than be at the trouble of drawing from a deep well, we are contented to sip muddy waters from any puddle that presents itself. Your answer to the above will much oblige

Your affectionate friend,

CRISPUS.

LETTER II.

ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

[In reply to the objections of Crispus.]

K——, Dec. 1794.

My dear Friend,

I RECEIVED yours with pleasure. It is quite agreeable to me to supply, as well as may be, the defect of personal intercourse by a free and friendly correspondence. Your thirst after truth is pleasing. Would to God we were all more of that temper which seeks for wisdom with the ardour of those who dig for hidden treasures! I intend it not as a mere compliment, when I say, that you have stated your objections to the doctrine of total depravity, in as plausible a manner as I ever recollect to have seen them. I will endeavour to give them all the weight they possess.

The point in dispute between us, you will observe, is, Whether an unregenerate sinner can be said to perform any part of his duty, or to obtain in any measure the approbation of his Maker? And I hope you will consider that this is, for substance, the same thing as, Whether the carnal mind be wholly enmity against God, or whether it be in any measure subject to the law of God, or indeed can be? You allow, I think, that whatever excellencies such characters possess, *the love of God is not in them*, no, not in any degree. Their amiable qualities therefore, be they what they may, must be something quite distinct from love, or any of its operations. But, as *love is the fulfilling of the law*, it must comprehend the whole of moral excellence; and consequently there can be no moral excellence in the sight of God without it.

You *first* reason from the cases of Ahab, the Ninevites, the young man whom our Lord is said to have *loved*, and the scribe who was declared to be *not far from the kingdom of heaven*. In answer to which I would observe. Though the great God knoweth the secrets of all hearts, yet in the government of the world he does not always proceed upon this principle. He has sometimes thought fit to reward men for their actions, not because he approved of them as actions of theirs, but merely because they tended to subserve his own great and wise designs. God rewarded Nebuchadnezzar for his long siege against Tyre, by giving him the land of Egypt ; yet Nebuchadnezzar did nothing in this undertaking which in its own nature could approve itself to God. The only reason why he was thus rewarded was, that what he had done subserved the divine purposes in punishing Tyre for her insulting treatment towards the people of God.* God also rewarded Cyrus with the treasures of Babylon, *the hidden riches of secret places*, as they are called ;† not because Cyrus did any thing that was pleasing in his sight ; his motive was the lust of dominion : but because what he did, effected the deliverance of Judah, and fulfilled the divine predictions upon Babylon.

And as, in the great system of the divine government, actions may be rewarded which have no appearance of innate goodness ; so others may be rewarded which have such an appearance, even though it be nothing but appearance. God does not always avail himself of his omniscience, if I may so speak ; but proceeds upon the supposition that men are what they profess and appear to be. The end of Jehovah in punishing the person and the house of Ahab, was to make *manifest* his displeasure against their idolatries. But if, when Ahab humbled himself, and rent his garments, God had proceeded towards him on the ground of his omniscience ; and, knowing him to be destitute of sincerity, had made no difference in his treatment of him, that *end* would not have been answered. For, whatever might be Ahab's motives, they were unknown to men : and if no difference had appeared in the divine treatment, they would have concluded that it was vain to

* Ezek. xxvi. 1—7. xxix. 17—20. † Isaiah xlv. 3.

serve God. It seemed good therefore to him, in the present life, to treat Ahab upon the supposition of his being sincere: and as to his insincerity, he will call him to account for that another day.

There is a case much resembling this of Ahab, in the history of Abijah; the son of Rehoboam. In 2 Chron. xiii. we read of his wars with Jeroboam the son of Nebat, king of Israel, and how he addressed the apostate Israelites previously to the battle. Having reproached them with forsaking the God of their fathers, and turning to idolatry, he adds, *But as for us, Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken him: and the priests which minister unto Jehovah are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business: and they bring unto Jehovah, every morning and every evening, burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shew-bread also set they in order upon the pure table, and the candlestick of gold, with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening: for we keep the charge of Jehovah our God; but ye have forsaken him. And behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O ye children of Israel, fight ye not against Jehovah, God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper!* To all appearance this prince was zealous for Jehovah, God of Israel; and one might suppose that the signal victory given him over Jeroboam was an expression of divine approbation: but if we turn to the account given of the same reign, in 1 Kings xv. we shall find that this Abijah, (or Abijam, as he is there called,) was a wicked prince; that, notwithstanding his boasting language when addressing Israel, he walked in all the sins of his father; and that although God gave him a signal victory over the idolatrous Israelites, yet it was not for his sake, or out of regard to any thing he did; but *for David's sake, and for the establishment of Jerusalem.* His attachment to Jehovah was nothing better than pharisaical formality; and his boastings of the state of things in Judah were no better than the swellings of spiritual pride: but God proceeded with him, not according to his principles, but according to his professions. His hypocrisy was known to God; and he will appear to take cognizance of it in the day when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

Much the same things might be observed concerning the *Ninevites*. There might be many true penitents among them, for ought we know; but whether holy love or slavish fear was their motive, they professed and appeared to be humbled and discovered all the apparent fruits of repentance; and as such it was manifestly an instance of divine wisdom, as tending to do honour to his own government in the eyes of surrounding nations, to proceed with them upon the supposition of their repentance being sincere. The confessions and humiliations of *Pharaoh* likewise were repeatedly followed by the removal of those judgments which appalled his proud spirit, and so occasioned them; yet few will attribute goodness to Pharaoh. Not only the Divine Being, but Moses himself saw his insincerity, and bid him *glory over him.* God however would remove the judgment when he made confession, let his motives be what they might, and even though he might laugh to himself for having imposed upon Moses so far as to gain his point.

The *young man* who came to Christ, appears to have been a conceited pharisee, who loved the present world, and not God; and is represented by our Lord as being as far from entering into the kingdom of heaven, as a camel was from passing through the eye of a needle. The only difficulty arises from its being said, that the Lord *beheld him, and loved him;* which may seem to imply at least a partial approbation of his character. But to this it may be answered: Our Lord was at this time acting in *the character of a preacher, or instructor of men.* His feelings towards the young man in question were much the same as ours would have been, had we been possessed of true *benevolence*, and in the same circumstances. Let the best man that ever existed be addressed in this manner; let him behold a poor self-deceived youth, flattered by all around him for his seeming virtue, and flattering himself with the hopes of heaven, while in reality he is a slave to the present world; and let him, if he can, forbear to feel towards him like our Lord. He would tell him the truth, though it should send him away *sad and grieved;* but his heart would at the same time melt in *compassion* to his poor deluded soul. But this would imply no more of an *approbation* of his spirit or conduct than was

included in our Lord's looking upon Jerusalem and weeping over it.

As to the *scribe*, who answered our Lord *discreetly*, and was assured that he was *not far from the kingdom of God*. read the passage, (Mark xii. 28—34.) and you will perceive that it was not in relation to his *spirit* or *conduct* that our Lord spake, for not a word is recorded of either; but merely of his *confession of faith: That the love of God and man was of more account than whole burnt-offerings or sacrifices.* This doctrine was so true, and contained so much of the spirit of the gospel dispensation, that our Lord very properly assured this discreet inquirer, that he was *not far from the kingdom of God;* that is, that the principles which he had avowed, if truly imbibed and properly pursued, would lead him into the very heart of Christianity.

The remainder of your objections I must take another opportunity to answer; and at present subscribe myself

Your affectionate friend,

GAIUS.

LETTER III.

ON THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE.

[A further reply to the objections of Crispus.]

K——, Feb. 9, 1795.

My dear Friend,

I TAKE up my pen to answer some other of your objections, as stated in yours of July 3, 1794. You not only reason from the case of Ahab, the Ninevites, &c. but, secondly, from the *common sense of mankind*, which attributes amiable qualities to persons whom nevertheless, on other accounts, we are obliged to consider as destitute of true religion But let me intreat you to consider whether the common sense of one man can take cognizance of the motives which govern the actions of another; and whether therefore it can be any competent judge of the acceptableness of his actions in the sight of God, who sees things as they are. All the morality in the world consists in *the love of God and our neighbour.* There is not a virtue, nor a virtuous action in being but what is an expression of love; yet, as there are numberless actions which bear a likeness to those which arise from love, and as it is beyond the province of man to take cognizance of the heart, it is common for us to call those actions amiable which *appear* to be so, and which are beneficial to human society. It is fit we should do so; otherwise we invade the province of the Supreme Being, who alone is able so to judge of actions as perfectly to ascertain their motives. *He is the God of knowledge, by whom actions are weighed.*

It is right, no doubt, that children should be dutiful to their parents, parents affectionate to their children, and that every rela-

tion of life should be filled up with fidelity and honour. But these duties require to be discharged *in the love of God*, not without it: nor is there any duty performed, strictly speaking, where the love of God is wanting. Read those parts of Paul's epistles, where he exhorts to relative duties, and you will find that he admonishes children to obey their parents *in the Lord;* parents to bring up their children *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;* servants to obey their masters *in singleness of heart, as unto Christ;* and masters to be just and kind unto their servants, as having an eye to *their master in heaven*——adding, *And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.* Now all those persons whose behaviour may appear to be amiable in such relations, but who have not the love of God in them, do what they do, merely *as unto men;* and, consequently, fly in the face of the apostolic exhortation, instead of complying with it, even in the least degree.

It may me asked, If a merely external compliance with relative duties be a sin, would the omission of them be any better? I answer, No; but worse. There are as has been allowed before, different degrees of sin. To perform an action which tends to the good of society from a wrong motive, is sin; but to neglect to perform it, or to perform one of an opposite tendency, is a greater sin. In the one case we sin against God; in the other, against both God and our neighbour.

Thirdly: You allege, that "every man is possessed of *conscience*, which bears witness to him in numberless instances of what is right and wrong; and this witness is known to have considerable influence even on wicked men, so as to impel them to the performance of many good actions, and to deter them from others which are evil." To this I answer, (1.) Conscience though necessary to the performance of both good and evil, does not partake of either the one or the other. Conscience is that branch of the intellectual faculty which takes cognizance of the good and evil of our own actions; but is itself distinct from both. It is simple knowledge, essential indeed to moral agency, being one of the principal things by which we are distinguished from the brute creation; but, as all duty is contained in *love*, good and evil must consist entirely in the temper or disposition of the heart; and the

mere dictates of conscience including no such dispositions, neither good nor evil can, strictly speaking, be predicated of them. Neither men nor devils will ever cease to possess consciences, witnessing to them what is good and evil, even in a world of misery, when, as all must allow, they will be utterly destitute of virtue or goodness. We read, it is true, of a *good* conscience, and an *evil* conscience, of a conscience *seared* as with a hot iron, &c. and so we read of an *evil eye*, of *eyes full of adultery that cannot cease from sin:* but, as there is neither good nor evil in the sight of the eye, only as it is under the influence of the temper or disposition of the soul, so neither is there in the dictates of conscience. If there be any virtue or goodness in wicked men, it consists not in their knowledge of the difference between good and evil; but with complying with the one, and avoiding the other.—(2.) That compliance with the dictates of conscience of which wicked men are the subjects, has nothing of the *love of God* in it; and consequently no real virtue. While conscience suggests what is duty, a variety of motives may induce men to comply with it, or rather with those actions which are usually the expressions of it; such as, self-interest, a sense of honour, the fear of reproach in this world, and of divine wrath in another: and while they act in this manner, they are considered as acting conscientiously; but if *love be the fulfilling of the law*, where love is wanting, the law is not fulfilled; no, not in the least degree.

Fourthly: You allege that "if all the actions of unregenerate men be not only mixed with sin, but are in their own nature sinful, then, whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they sin against God: but that eating and drinking in moderation appear to be natural actions, and contain neither moral good nor moral evil." When I affirm that all the actions of unregenerate men are sinful, I would be understood by actions to mean all voluntary exercises, and which are capable of being performed to a good end. Whatever is capable of being so performed is not a mere natural, but a moral action. That eating and drinking, and every other voluntary exercise, are moral actions, is evident; for we are exhorted, *whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God.* In an irrational being, it is true, these would

be mere natural actions; but in a moral agent they are not so; and the manner in which they are attended to renders them either good or evil. Every rational creature performs these actions either to the glory of God, (that is, that he may be strengthened to serve the Lord, and do good in his generation,) or he does not. If he do, they are virtuous; if not, there is a criminal defect in the end of them: and, as the end or intent of an action is that which determines its nature, that which otherwise would have been lawful and laudable becomes sinful. To plow the soil is as much a natural action as eating and drinking; yet, as all such actions are performed by wicked men for mere selfish purposes, without any regard to God and the general good, they become sinful in the sight of God; and hence we read that *the plowing of the wicked is sin.*

Lastly: You allege, that "if these principles be true, there can be no ground for a ministerial address; no motive by which to exhort unregenerate men to cease from evil, and do good; nor any encouragement for them to comply with any thing short of what is spiritually good." If you mean to say that ministers, on this account, can entertain no well-founded hope of success from the pliability of men's hearts, I fully grant it. Our expectations must rest upon the power and promise of God, and these alone, or we shall be disappointed. But if you mean to suggest that therefore all addresses to unregenerate sinners, exhorting them to do good, are unreasonable, this is more than can be admitted. If a *total* depravity would take away all ground for a rational address, a *partial* one would take it away in part; and then in proportion as we see men disinclined to goodness, we are to cease warning and expostulating with them! But this is self-evident absurdity. The truth is, while men are rational beings they are accountable for all they do, whatever be the inclination of their hearts; and so long as they are not consigned to hopeless perdition, they are the subjects of a gospel address. Nor can it be affirmed with truth, that there are no *motives* for them on which they can be exhorted to cease to do evil, or learn to do well: the motives to these things exist in all their native force, independently of the inclination or disinclination of their hearts to comply with them. Nor is the

use of them in the Christian ministry thereby rendered improper: on the contrary, it is highly necessary; as much so as it is for the sun to keep his course, and go on to shine, notwithstanding it may prove the occasion of a filthy dunghill emitting a greater stench. If any means be adapted to do good to wicked men, they are such as tend to fasten *conviction* upon them; but there is no mean more adapted to this end than putting them upon *trial*. A sinner is exhorted to repent and believe in Christ—he feels hardened in insensibility—he *cannot* repent—he has no desire after Christ. A consciousness of this kind, if it operate according to its native tendency, will lead him to reflect, 'What a state must I be in! Invited to repent and believe in Christ for the salvation of my soul, and cannot comply! Mine, surely, is the very heart of an infernal!' Let a sinner be brought to such a state of mind, and there is some hope concerning him.

You seem to feel sorry that there should be no encouragement held out to sinners to comply with any thing but what is spiritually good; and many who have sustained the character of Christian ministers have felt the same; and, considering that poor sinners *cannot* comply with duties of this kind, have contented themselves with exhorting them to things with which they *can* comply, and still retain their enmity against God. But what authority have they for such a conduct? When did Christ or his apostles deal in such compromising doctrine? *Repentance* toward God and *faith* towards our Lord Jesus Christ were the grand articles on which they insisted. So far from hesitating to exhort their carnal auditors to what was spiritually good, it may be safely affirmed, that THEY NEVER EXHORTED THEM TO ANY THING ELSE. It would have been unworthy of God, and of his servants, to require any thing short of the heart, or its genuine expressions.

To conclude: The following supposition may serve to illustrate the foregoing subject. A ship's company rise against their officers, put them in chains, and take the command of the ship upon themselves. They agree to set the officers ashore on some uninhabited island, to sail to some distant port, dispose of the cargo, and divide the amount. After parting with their officers, they

find it necessary, for the sake of self-preservation, to establish some kind of laws and order.

To these they adhere with punctuality, act upon honour with respect to each other, and propose to be very impartial in the distribution of their plunder. But, while they are on their voyage, one of the company relents, and becomes very unhappy. They inquire the reason. He answers, 'We are engaged in a wicked cause!' They plead their justice, honour, and generosity to each other. He denies that there is any virtue in it: 'Nay, all our equity, while it is exercised in pursuit of a scheme which violates the great law of justice, is itself a species of iniquity!'—'You talk extravagantly; surely we might be worse than we are if we were to destroy each other as well as our officers.'—'Yes, wickedness admits of degrees; but there is no virtue or goodness in all our doings; all has arisen from selfish motives. The same principles which led us to discard our officers would lead us, if it were not for our own sake, to destroy each other.'—'But you speak so very *discouraging;* you destroy all *motives* to good order in the ship: what would you have us do?'—'REPENT, RETURN TO OUR INJURED OFFICERS AND OWNERS, AND SUBMIT TO MERCY!'—'O, but this we *cannot* do: advise us to any thing which concerns the good order of the ship, and we will harken to you!'—'I *cannot* bear to advise in these matters! RETURN, RETURN, AND SUBMIT TO MERCY!' Such would be the language of a true penitent in this case; and such should be the language of a christian minister to sinners who have cast off the government of God.

I am affectionately yours,

GAIUS.

LETTER IV.

CONSEQUENCES RESULTING FROM THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY.

[From Crispus to Gaius.]

C——n, March 9, 1795.

My dear Friend,

Your last two letters have occupied much of my attention. I confess I feel the force of the argument; and though there are difficulties in my mind which I scarcely know how to state in form, yet I must ingenuously confess that the grand objections which I advanced are answered. The subject is more interesting to me than ever: it affects all the great doctrines of the gospel. My thoughts have already been at work upon its consequences. I could wish, after having discussed the subject, we could examine its *bearings* on the different systems which are embraced in the religious world. With your leave, I will mention a few of those consequences which have struck my mind as resulting from it; and shall be obliged to you for your opinion of their propriety, and the addition of any thing wherein you may perceive me defective.

First: If your views be just, I perceive that *all mankind*, without any distinction of sober and profligate, are UTTERLY LOST, AND ABSOLUTELY IN A PERISHING CONDITION. All men will acknowledge that they are *sinners;* that they have broken God's commandments, most or all of them, in thought or in deed, at one time or other; and that the best of their works have their imperfections. But such acknowledgements are seldom expressive of

any deep concern. On the contrary, it is common for men, while they speak thus, to discover a spirit of indifference, supported by a kind of hope that God will pardon a few sins, and make up for a few imperfections; otherwise, they say, he must keep heaven to himself. But, if your views be just, their whole life has been one uninterrupted course of foul revolt and abominable apostasy; and the irregularities of their lives bear no more proportion to the whole of their depravity, than the particles of water which are occasionally emitted from the surface of the ocean to the tide that rolls beneath. Nor is there any propriety in men of this description acknowledging their *imperfections:* imperfections relate to a standard, and imply an habitual aim to conform to it. Such language is properly applied to the righteous, the best of whom fall short of the mark; but the life of wicked men is, in one shape or other, an uninterrupted course of evil.

Secondly: If your views be just, they seem to afford a presumptive, if not more than presumptive proof of OUR NEED OF A SAVIOUR; and not of a Saviour only, but of A GREAT ONE! I do not know whether I can exactly trace the operation of these principles, or their opposites, in the human mind; but this I know, it is a fact sufficiently notorious, that those professors of Christianity who reject the proper Deity and atonement of Christ, at the same time entertain very diminutive notions of their own depravity. I have known many persons, who as soon as they have begun to lean towards the Socinian, Arian, or Arminian systems, have discovered an inclination to treat this doctrine with contempt. Those people, on the other hand, who have sat under such preaching as has led them to entertain low thoughts of Christ and the grace of the gospel, if at some period of their life they have been convinced of their guilty and perishing state as sinners against God, they have soon given up their other notions, and embraced the deity and atonement of Christ with all their hearts, and that with but little if any persuasion on the part of their friends. Nor does this appear very difficult to be accounted for: as *the whole need no physician, but those that are sick;* so it is natural to suppose, that in proportion as a person feels the depth and danger of his malady,

he will estimate the necessity, the value, and the efficacy of the remedy.

Thirdly: If your views be just, I perceive that the work of *turning a sinner's heart must be altogether of God, and of free grace.* If a sinner could return to God of his own accord, or even by divine influence *helping* or *assisting* him, it must be upon the supposition of his having some will, wish, or desire to set about it. But if men are *totally* alienated from God, all desire after him must be extinct; and all the warnings, invitations, or expostulations of the word will be ineffectual: yea, divine influence itself will be insufficient, if it falls short of renewing the heart. We have heard much of late concerning *political regeneration.* It has been warmly contended by many in behalf of the change which has taken place in a neighbouring nation, that things were too bad for a *mere reformation;* and that therefore *regeneration* was necessary. However that be, is it not on these principles that we are told, *Ye must be born again.* Old things *must* pass away, and all things *must* become new? If men be so depraved as you suppose, the necessity of a *divine* and *entire* change must be indubitably evident.

Fourthly: If your views be just, the doctrine of *free* or *unconditional election* may be clearly demonstrated, and proved to be a dictate of right reason. If men be utterly depraved, they lie entirely at the discretion of God, either to save, or not to save them. If any are saved, it must be by an act of free grace. If some are brought to believe in Christ, while others continue in unbelief, (which accords with continued fact,) the difference between them must be altogether of grace. But if God make a difference in time, he must have determined to do so from eternity: for to suppose God to act without a purpose is depriving him of wisdom; and to suppose any new purpose to arise in his mind, would be to accuse him of mutability. Here, therefore, we are landed upon election—sovereign unconditional election. And does not this accord with the holy scriptures?—*You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein, in times past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom, also, we all had our conversation in times past, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the chil-*

dren of wrath even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. By grace are ye saved!—I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy ; and will have compassion on whom I will have compassion !—He hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling ; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

Fifthly : If your views be just, the *justification of sinners by the work of their hands* utterly falls to the ground. The foundation on which sinners in general build their hopes is something like this : They have more virtue than vice, more good works than evil ones : that, as none are without fault, (and which they conceive affords a good excuse for them,) God will not be strict to mark iniquity ; but will weigh the good against the evil, and so balance the account ! But if all the works of unregenerate sinners be of the nature of sin, there is an end to all hope of being accepted of God on their own account. When ministers have endeavoured to dissuade sinners from a reliance on their own righteousness, I have heard them reason to this effect : ' Your good deeds are all *mixed* with evil, and therefore cannot be acceptable to God.' This I acknowledge is just, and that the least mixture of sin is an eternal bar to our being justified by our own righteousness : but methinks if they could have alleged that all their works were essentially and entirely evil, their arguments must have been more effectual, as to the cutting up of self-righteous hopes. And such a doctrine would leave no room for the supposition of Christ dying to render our imperfect but sincere obedience acceptable to God, instead of that which is perfect : for, in this case, the idea of imperfect sincere endeavours in unregenerate men is inadmisible—there are no such endeavours in existence.

These things I have been used to believe in time past ; but if the principle in question be admitted, I find such solid grounds on which to rest them, as I never felt before. I shall leave you to conclude the subject and remain

Affectionately yours,

CRISPUS.

LETTER V.

CONSEQUENCES RESULTING FROM THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY.

[From Gaius to Crispus.]

K——, April 9, 1795.

My dear Friend,

If any thing I have advanced in the course of our correspondence has been of use to you, I am satisfied. The inferences which you have drawn from the doctrine of *total depravity*, as far as they go, appear to me to be just. I shall offer a few others in addition to them: and as I have some other necessary employments which require my attention, you will excuse me, if I propose with these, for the present, to close our correspondence.

Your inferences relate to the bearings of the doctrine of total depravity on the Socinian and Arminian schemes; mine shall concern what I should call the *Pseudo-Calvinistic* scheme, or that view of the doctrines commonly called Calvinistical, which induces many, in the present day, to disapprove of all exhortations to sinners, except to merely external obedience, or things which contain in them nothing truly or spiritually good. If the foregoing principle be just, three things at least will follow; namely—that the distinction between moral virtue and true religion has less foundation in truth than is commonly supposed—that men in general are either obliged to perform spiritual actions, or allowed to live in sin and perform sinful actions—and that we ought not, as ministers, so to compromise matters with God's enemies, as to exhort them to merely external services. Let us particularly examine these consequences. They will be found to be more than a little interesting.

First: Let us inquire, whether the distinction between moral virtue and true religion be founded in truth. It is true, the term religion includes more than that of morality; as it is applied to doctrine as well as practice, and to the performance of things positive as well as moral: but if genuine morality be supposed to exist without true religion, such a supposition I conceive to be unfounded. It is allowed that what is commonly *called* morality, is very different from true religion; because much that goes by this name is not morality, nor any thing truly virtuous. Nothing is morality, strictly speaking, but that which is in some degree a conformity to the moral law; and nothing contains the least degree of conformity to the moral law, unless it include the love of God and our neighbour. There is, therefore, no such thing as morality in wicked men. On the contrary, *the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* That which constitutes the essence of genuine morality, namely, the love of God and man, contains the sum of practical religion. Repentance, faith, and every species of obedience, are but different modifications of love. If we love God, we cannot but *repent* of having offended and dishonoured him. If we love God in his true character, and bear genuine benevolence to man, we cannot but *love a Saviour*, and *embrace a salvation* which proclaims *glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men.* The rejection of Christ by the Jews afforded a proof that they *had not the love of God in them.* If we love God, we shall love his image in those that are born of him. In fine; if we love God, we shall keep his commandments, and his commandments will not be grievous.

It is common for professed Infidels, and other enemies to true religion, to cry up morality as something opposed to it; and hence, it may be, some have thought proper to cry it down: yea, many, who by their practice have proved themselves friendly to a holy life, have yet, on this account it should seem, found it necessary so to distinguish between morality and religion as to represent the former as something very inferior in its nature to the latter. But it ought to be considered, that the morality on which the enemies of true religion love to dwell is of a *spurious kind:* it does not

consist in the love of God in his true character, or of men in such a way as to rejoice in what contributes to their greatest good. It is a morality essentially defective ; it leaves God and religion out of the question, and is confined to what are called the *social virtues*, or things which every man in his dealings with men finds it his interest to promote. When we hear such characters cry up morality, instead of coldly admitting it to be a very good thing in its place, and insisting that religion is something of an entirely different nature, we ought cordially to allow the importance of genuine morality, and insist upon it, that if this were attended to, true religion could not be neglected. Such characters would then discover their dislike to our morality, as much as they now do to what is called religion. Such a statement of matters, though it might grate on their inclinations, must, however, approve itself to their *consciences*. Every man feels himself obliged to act upon the principles of morality. Let us then drive home that point in which we have their consciences on our side : let us say with the poet,

> "Talk they of morals, O thou bleeding love !
> The grand morality is of love of Thee !"

While you speak of religion as something entirely distinct from morality, such a character will rest contentedly in the neglect of the one, and think himself happy inasmuch as you allow him to be possessed of the other. But could you prove to him that morality, if genuine, would comprise the love of God, of Christ, of the gospel, and of the whole of true religion, it would implant a thorn in his bosom, which he would find it difficult to extract.

Secondly : If the foregoing principles be true, it will follow that men in general are either obliged to perform spiritual actions, or allowed to live in sin, and perform sinful actions. In the voluntary actions of a rational creature, there is no medium between what is good and well pleasing, and what is evil and offensive in the sight of God. All our actions are, in some mode or other, *the expressions of love*, or *they are not*. If they *are*, they are spiritually good ; they are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, if it be done *to*

the glory of God, this is *godliness*. The actions performed may be simply natural, but the end to which they are directed, and which determines their quality, denominates them spiritual. On the other hand: If they *are not*, there is no possibility of their being any other than sinful. The want of love is itself a sin; it is a sinful defect relating to principle; and whatever is done otherwise than as an expression of love, let it wear what face it may, it is a sinful action. We ourselves esteem nothing in a fellow-creature which is not in some mode or other the expression of love. If a wife were ever so assiduous in attending to her husband, yet if he were certain that her heart was not with him, he would abhor her endeavours to please him, and nothing that she did would be acceptable in his sight.

Instead of its being a question, whether God requires any thing of carnal men which is spiritually good; it is evident, both from scripture and the nature of things, THAT HE REQUIRES NOTHING BUT WHAT IS SO. It has been alleged, that the obedience which God required of Israel by the Sinai covenant was merely *external, and did not extend to the heart.* Their government, it is said, was a theocracy: God acted towards them under the character of a civil governor; and if so, it is supposed he must forbear to take cognizance of the heart, which is beyond the province of creatures to inspect. That God acted towards Israel as a civil governor is admitted; and that it belongs not to a civil governor, in his *executive* capacity, to take cognizance of the heart, is also admitted. In the bestowment of rewards and punishments, he must act from what is *apparent* in the lives of men, having no other medium by which to judge of the temper of their hearts: but it is not so with respect to *legislation*, or the formation of the laws. No civil government upon earth will *allow* its subjects to hate it in their hearts, provided they do but carry it fair in their conduct. The spirit of all laws, in all nations, requires men to be *sincere friends to their country;* but as there is no medium for mortals to judge of the heart but that of an *overt act*, it is fit that this should be the established rule for the dispensation of rewards and punishments. It was thus, I conceive, in the government of God over Israel. Every precept contained in the Sinai covenant required the heart, or,

which is the same thing, some genuine expression of it; but under its administration punishments were not always inflicted, nor rewards conferred, according to what men really were, but what they appeared to be, or according to the judgment which would have been pronounced had a fellow-creature sat in judgment upon them. It was on this principle that Ahab's punishment was averted on his humbling himself before God. So far was the divine Legislator from *requiring* mere external obedience by the Sinai covenant, that the grand preliminary to that covenant was this: *If ye will obey my voice* INDEED, *and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.* And what is meant by obeying his voice *indeed*, is sufficiently evident, by the subsequent addresses of Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and others; in many of which it is observable, that though the blessings promised were external, yet the proviso on which the promises were made was nothing less than *a heart sincerely devoted to God: If ye will hearken diligently unto my commandments*, TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND TO SERVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, *I will give you the rain of your land in his season: the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn and thy wine, and thine oil.—Take heed to yourselves, that your* HEART BE NOT DECEIVED, *and ye turn aside, and serve other gods; and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit, and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you.—Take diligent heed to do the commandments which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you*, TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND TO WALK IN ALL HIS WAYS, AND TO CLEAVE UNTO HIM, AND TO SERVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL.—ONLY FEAR THE LORD, AND SERVE HIM IN TRUTH, WITH ALL YOUR HEART; *for consider what great things he hath done for you.* If *external* obedience were all that God required by the Sinai covenant, why was he not satisfied with the goodly professions which they made during that solemn transaction, saying, *All these things will we do*; and wherefore did he utter that cutting exclamation, *O that there were* SUCH AN HEART IN THEM, *that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children for ever!*

Lastly: If the foregoing principles be just, instead of being a question whether ministers should exhort their carnal auditors to any thing spiritually good, it deserves to be seriously considered, WHETHER IT BE NOT AT THEIR PERIL TO EXHORT THEM TO ANY THING SHORT OF IT.—If all duty consists in the genuine operations and expressions of the heart, it must be utterly wrong for ministers to compromise matters with the enemies of God, by exhorting them to mere external actions, or to such a kind of exercise as may be performed without the love of God. It is disloyalty to God; betraying his just authority over the heart, and admitting that in behalf of him which we should despise if offered to ourselves from a fellow-creature. Nor is it less injurious to the souls of men; as it tends to quiet their consciences, and to cherish an opinion that, having complied with many of the exhortations of their minister, they have done many things pleasing and acceptable to God; while, in fact, *every thought and imagination of their heart has been only evil continually.*

It may be thought that these things bear hard upon the unconverted sinner, and reduce him to a *terrible* situation. But if such in fact be his situation, it will not mend the matter to daub it with the untempered mortar of palliation: on the contrary, it will render it still more terrible. The truth is, there is no way for a sinner to take, in which he can find solid rest, but that of returning home to God by Jesus Christ. And, instead of trying to render his situation easy, it ought to be our business as ministers, to drive him from every other resting place; not for the sake of plunging him into despair, but, if it please God to bless our labours, that he may be necessitated to betake himself to the *good old way, and find rest unto his soul!* We ought solemnly to assure him, that, do what else he will, he sins, and is heaping upon his head a load of guilt that will sink him into endless perdition. If he pray, or frequent the means of grace, *his prayer is an abomination to the Lord;* if he live in the omission of these things, it is worse. Whether he eat or drink, plow the soil, or gather in the harvest, (like the supposed ship's company, mentioned before, who with all their regularity continued in their rebellious course,) all is iniquity. *Incense is an abomination; it is iniquity, even the solemn*

meeting. To die, is to be plunged into the gulf of destruction; and to live, if he continue in enmity to God, is worse; as it is heaping up wrath, in an enlarged degree, against the day of wrath. What then, it will be asked, can sinners do? If they go forward, destruction is before them; if on this hand, or on that, it is the same. Whither can they go? and what must they do? All the answer which the scriptures warrant us to make is included in the warnings and invitations of the gospel:—*Repent, and believe the gospel.—Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.—Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.—Deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven!* If the answer be, 'We cannot comply with these things; our hearts are too hard; advise us to any thing else, and we will hearken;"—if this, or something like it, I say, should be the answer, the servant of God, having warned them that what they call their *incapacity* is no other than a wicked aversion to God and goodness, that they judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life, and that their blood will be upon their own heads,—must there leave them. His soul may weep in secret places for them; but it is at his peril to compromise the matter. If, seeing they *cannot* find in their hearts to comply with the invitations of the gospel, he should offer any directions which imply that their inability is of such a kind as to afford them any excuse; any directions which imply that it is not their immediate duty to repent and return to God by Jesus Christ; any directions which may descend within the compass of their inclinations; let him look to it! They may be pleased with his advice, and comply with it; and, considering it as about the whole of what can reasonably be expected of them in their present circumstances, they may be very easy; and persisting in such a spirit, they may die in it, and perish for ever; BUT THEIR BLOOD WILL SURELY BE REQUIRED AT HIS HAND!

I am, my dear friend,

Yours very affectionately,

GAIUS.

THREE CONVERSATIONS,

ON

IMPUTATION, SUBSTITUTION, AND PARTICULAR REDEMPTION.

CONVERSATION I.

ON IMPUTATION.

PETER and JAMES considered each other as good men, and had for several years been in the habit of corresponding on divine subjects. Their respect was mutual. Their sentiments, however, though alike in the main, were not exactly the same; and some circumstances had lately occurred, which tended rather to magnify the difference than to lessen it. Being both at the house of JOHN, their common friend, in his company they fell into the following conversation.

I am not without painful apprehension, said Peter to John, that the views of our friend James on some of the doctrines of the gospel, are unhappily diverted from the truth. I suspect he does not believe in the proper *imputation* of sin to Christ, or of Christ's righteousness to us; nor in his being our *substitute*, or representative.

John. Those are serious things; but what are the grounds, Brother Peter, on which your suspicions rest?

Peter. Partly what he has published, which I cannot reconcile with those doctrines; and partly what he has said in my hearing, which I consider as an avowal of what I have stated.

John. What say you to this, Brother James ?

James. I cannot tell whether what I have written or spoken accords with Brother Peter's ideas on these subjects : indeed I suspect it does not : but I never thought of calling either of the doctrines in question. Were I to relinquish the one or the other, I should be at a loss for ground on which to rest my salvation. What he says of my avowing my disbelief of them in his hearing must be a misunderstanding. I did say, I suspected that *his views* of imputation and substitution were unscriptural ; but had no intention of disowning the doctrines themselves.

Peter. Brother James, I have no desire to assume any dominion over your faith ; but should be glad to know what are your ideas on these important subjects. Do you hold that sin was properly imputed to Christ, and that Christ's righteousness is properly imputed to us or not ?

James. You are quite at liberty, Brother Peter, to ask me any questions on these subjects ; and if you will hear me patiently, I will answer you as explicitly as I am able.

John. Do so, Brother James ; and we shall hear you, not only patiently, but, I trust, with pleasure.

James. To impute, (חשב ; λογίζομαι.) signifies, in general, to *charge*, *reckon*, or *place to account*, according to the different objects to which it is applied. This word, like many others, has a *proper* and an *improper*, or figurative meaning.

First : It is applied to the *charging*, *reckoning*, or *placing to the account* of persons and things, THAT WHICH PROPERLY BELONGS TO THEM. This I consider as its *proper* meaning. In this sense the word is used in the following passages : *Eli* THOUGHT *she* (*Hannah*) *had been drunken.—Hanan and Mattaniah, the treasurers, were* COUNTED *faithful.—Let a man so* ACCOUNT *of us as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.—Let such an one* THINK *this, that such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also indeed when we are present.—I* RECKON *that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.* Reckoning, or accounting, in the above instances, is no other than judging of persons and things *according to what they are, or appear to be.* To impute sin

in this sense is to charge guilt upon the guilty in a judicial way, or with a view to punishment. Thus Shimei besought David that his iniquity might *not be imputed to him;* thus the man is pronounced blessed to whom the Lord *imputeth not iniquity;* and thus Paul prayed that the sin of those who deserted him might *not be laid to their charge.*

In this sense the term is ordinarily used in common life. To impute treason or any other crime to a man, is the same thing as charging him with having committed it, and this with a view to his being punished.

Secondly: It is applied to the *charging, reckoning,* or *placing to the account* of persons and things, THAT WHICH DOES NOT PROPERLY BELONG TO THEM, AS THOUGH IT DID. This I consider as its *improper,* or figurative meaning. In this sense the word is used in the following passages: *And this your heave-offerings shall be* RECKONED *unto you* AS THOUGH IT WERE *the corn of the threshing-floor, and as the fulness of the wine-press.—Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and* HOLDEST *me for thine enemy.—If the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be* COUNTED *for circumcision.—If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought,* PUT THAT ON MINE ACCOUNT.

It is in this *latter* sense that I understand the term when applied to justification. *Abraham believed God, and it was* COUNTED *unto him for righteousness.—To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is* COUNTED *for righteousness.* The counting, or reckoning, in these instances, is not a judging of things *as they are;* but *as they are not as though they were.* I do not think that faith here means the righteousness of the Messiah: for it is expressly called *believing.* It means believing, however, not as a virtuous exercise of the mind which God consented to accept instead of perfect obedience; but *as having respect to the promised Messiah,* and so to his righteousness as the ground of acceptance.* Justification is ascribed to faith, as healing frequently is in the New Testament; not as that from

* See Calvin's Institutes, *Book* III. Chap. XI. § 7. Also my Expository Discourses on Genesis, Chap. xv. 1—6.

which the *virtue* proceeds, but as that which *receives* from the Saviour's fulness.

But if it were allowed that faith in these passages really means the object believed in, still this was not Abraham's *own* righteousness, and could not be properly *counted* by him who judges of things as they are, as being so. It was *reckoned* unto him *as if it were* his : and the effects, or benefits, of it were actually imparted to him : but this was all. Abraham did not become meritorious, or cease to be unworthy.

"What is it to place our righteousness in the obedience of Christ," says Calvin, "but to affirm that hereby only we are *accounted* righteous ; because the obedience of Christ is imputed to us as if it were our own."*

It is thus also that I understand the imputation of sin to Christ. He was accounted, in the divine administration, *as if he were or had been* the sinner, that those who believe in him might be accounted *as if they were or had been* righteous.

Brethren, I have done. Whether my statement be just, or not, I hope it will be allowed to be explicit.

John. That it certainly is ; and we thank you. Have you any other questions, Brother Peter, to ask upon the subject ?

Peter. How do you understand the Apostle in 2 Cor. v. 21. *He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him ?*

James. Till lately I cannot say that I have thought closely upon it. I have understood that several of our best writers consider the word αμαρτια (*sin,*) as frequently meaning a *sin-offering.* Dr. Owen so interprets it in his answer to Biddle, (p. 510.) though it seems he afterwards changed his mind. Considering the opposition between the sin which Christ was made, and the righteousness which we are made, together with the same word being used for that which he was *made*, and that which he *knew not,* I am inclined to be of the Doctor's last opinion ; namely, that the sin which Christ was made, means *sin itself*, and the righteousness which we are made, means *righteousness itself.* I doubt not but

* Institutes, *Book*, III. Chap. XI. § 23.

that the allusion is to the sin-offering under the law ; but not to its being *made a sacrifice*. Let me be a little more particular. There were two things belonging to the sin offering. First : The imputation of the sins of the people, signified by the priest's laying his hands upon the head of the animal, and confessing over it their transgressions ; and which is called " putting them upon it:" that is, it was *counted*, in the divine administration, *as if the animal had been* the sinner, and the only sinner of the nation. Secondly : Offering it in sacrifice, or " killing it before the Lord for an atonement." Now the phrase *made sin*, in 2 Cor. v. 21. appears to refer to the *first* step in this process in order to the last. It is expressive of what was preparatory to Christ's suffering death rather than of the thing itself, just as our being *made righteousness* expresses what was preparatory to God's bestowing upon us eternal life. But the term *made* is not to be taken literally ; for that would convey the idea of Christ's being really the subject of moral evil. It is expressive of a divine *constitution*, by which our Redeemer, with his own consent, stood in the sinner's place, as though he had been himself the transgressor ; just as the sin-offering under the law was, in mercy to Israel, reckoned or accounted to have the sins of the people " put upon its head :" with this difference ; that was only a shadow, but this went really to take away sin.

Peter. Do you consider Christ as having been *punished, really and properly* PUNISHED ?

James. I should think I do not. But what do you mean by punishment ?

Peter. An innocent person may *suffer*, but, properly speaking, he cannot be *punished*. Punishment necessarily supposes *criminality*.

James. Just so ; and therefore as I do not believe that Jesus was in any sense criminal, I cannot say he was really and properly punished.

Peter. Punishment is the infliction of natural evil for the commission of moral evil. It is not necessary, however, that the latter should have been committed by the party. Criminality is supposed : but it may be either personal or imputed.

James. This I cannot admit. Real and proper punishment, if I understand the term, is not only the infliction of natural evil for the commission of moral evil ; but the infliction of the one *upon the person who committed the other, and in displeasure against him.* It not only supposes criminality, but that the party punished was literally the criminal. Criminality committed by one party, and imputed to another, is not a ground for real and proper punishment. If Paul had sustained the punishment due to Onesimus for having wronged his master, yet it would not have been real and proper punishment *to him*, but *suffering* only, as not being inflicted in displeasure against him. I am aware of what has been said on this subject, that there was a more intimate *union* between Christ and those for whom he died, than could ever exist between creatures. But be it so ; it is enough for me that the union was not such as THAT THE ACTIONS OF THE ONE BECAME THOSE OF THE OTHER. Christ, even in the act of offering himself a sacrifice, when, to speak in the language of the Jewish law, the sins of the people were put or laid upon him, gave himself, nevertheless, THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST.

Peter. And thus it is that you understand the words of Isaiah, *The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all?*

James. Yes, he bore the punishment due to our sins, or that which, considering the dignity of his person, was equivalent to it. The phrase "He shall bear his iniquity," which so frequently occurs in the Old Testament, means, he shall bear the punishment due to his iniquity.

Peter. And yet you deny that Christ's sufferings were properly *penal?*

James. You would not deny eternal life which is promised to believers to be properly *a reward;* but you would deny its being *a real and proper reward* TO THEM.

Peter. And what then?

James. If eternal life, though it be a reward, and we partake of it, yet is really and properly the reward of Christ's obedience, and not ours ; then the sufferings of Christ, though they were a punishment, and he sustained it, yet were really and properly the punishment of our sins, and not his. What he bore *was* punish-

ment: that is, it was the expression of divine displeasure against transgressors. So what we enjoy *is* reward: that is, it is the expression of God's well-pleasedness in the obedience and death of his Son. But neither is the one a punishment *to him*, nor the other, properly speaking, a reward *to us*.

There appears to me great accuracy in the scripture language on this subject. What our Saviour underwent is almost always expressed by the term *suffering*. Once it is called a *chastisement:* yet there he is not said to have been chastised; but "the chastisement of our peace was *upon him*." This is the same as saying he bore *our* punishment. He was made a *curse for us;* that is, having been reckoned, or accounted the sinner, as though he had actually been so, he was treated accordingly, *as* one that had deserved to be an outcast from heaven and earth. I believe that the wrath of God which was due to us was poured upon him: but I do not believe that God for one moment was angry or displeased *with him*, or that he smote him from any such displeasure.

There is a passage in Calvin's *Institutes*, which so fully expresses my mind, that I hope you will excuse me if I read it. You will find it in Book II. Chap. XVI. § 10, 11. "It behoved him that he should, as it were, hand to hand, wrestle with the armies of hell, and the horror of eternal death. The chastisement of our peace was *laid upon him*. He was smitten of his Father for our crimes, and bruised for our iniquities: whereby is meant that he was put in the stead of the wicked, as surety and pledge, yea, and *as* the very guilty person himself, to sustain and bear away all the punishments that should have been laid upon them, save only that he could not be holden of death.—Yet do we not mean that God was at any time either his enemy, or angry with him. For how could he be angry with his beloved Son, upon whom his mind rested? Or how could Christ by his intercession appease his Father's wrath towards others, if full of hatred, he had been incensed against himself? But this is our meaning—that he sustained the weight of the divine displeasure; inasmuch as he being stricken and tormented by the hand of God, DID FEEL ALL THE TOKENS OF GOD WHEN HE IS ANGRY AND PUNISHETH."

Peter. The words of scripture are very express: *He hath* MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US.—*He was* MADE A CURSE FOR US. You may, by diluting and qualifying interpretations, soften what you consider as intolerable *harshness.* In other words, you may choose to correct the language and sentiments of inspiration, and teach the Apostle to speak of his Lord with more decorum, lest his personal purity should be impeached, and lest the odium of the cross, annexed by divine law, remain attached to his death: but if you abide by the obvious meaning of the passages, you must hold with a *commutation of persons*, the *imputation* of sin and of righteousness, and a *vicarious punishment* equally pregnant with *execration* as with *death.*

John. I wish Brother Peter would forbear the use of language which tends not to convince, but to irritate.

James. If there be any thing convincing in it, I confess I do not perceive it. I admit, with Mr. Charnock, "That Christ was 'made sin' *as if* he had sinned all the sins of men; and we are 'made righteousness' *as if* we had not sinned at all." What more is necessary, to abide by the obvious meaning of the words? To go farther must be to maintain that Christ's being *made sin* means that he was literally rendered wicked, and that his being *made a curse* is the same thing as his being punished for it according to his deserts. Brother Peter, I am sure, does not believe this shocking position: but he seems to think there is a medium between his being treated *as if he were* a sinner, and his *being one.* If such a medium there be, I should be glad to discover it: at present it appears to me to have no existence.

Brother Peter will not suspect me, I hope, of wishing to depreciate his judgment, when I say, that he appears to me to be attached to certain terms without having sufficiently weighed their import. In most cases I should think it a privilege to learn of him; but in some things I cannot agree with him. In order to maintain the *real* and *proper punishment* of Christ, he talks of his being "guilty by imputation." The term *guilty*, I am aware, is often used by theological writers for *an obligation to punishment*, and so applies to that voluntary obligation which Christ came under to sustain the punishment of our sins: but, strictly speaking,

guilt is the *desert* of punishment ; and this can never apply but to the offender. It is the opposite of innocence. A voluntary obligation to endure the punishment of another is not guilt, any more than a consequent exemption from obligation in the offender is innocence. Both guilt and innocence are transferrable in their effects, but in themselves they are untransferrable. To say that Christ was *reckoned* or *counted* in the divine administration *as if he were* the sinner, and came under an obligation to endure the curse or punishment due to our sins, is one thing : but to say he *deserved* that curse is another. Guilt, strictly speaking, is the inseparable attendant of transgression, and could never therefore for one moment occupy the conscience of Christ. If Christ by imputation became *deserving* of punishment, we by non-imputation cease to deserve it ; and if our demerits be literally transferred to him, his merits must of course be the same to us : and then, instead of approaching God as *guilty* and *unworthy*, we might take consequence to ourselves before him, as not only guiltless but meritorious beings.

Peter. Some who profess to hold that believers are justified by the righteousness of Christ, deny nevertheless that his *obedience itself* is imputed to them : for they maintain that the scripture represents believers as receiving only the *benefits*, or effects of Christ's righteousness in justification, or their being pardoned and accepted for Christ's *righteousness' sake*. But it is not merely *for the sake* of Christ, or of what he has done, that believers are accepted of God, and treated as completely righteous ; but it is in him as their head, representative and substitute, and by the imputation of that *very obedience* which as such he performed to the divine law that they are justified.

James. I have no doubt but that the imputation of Christ's righteousness presupposes a union with him ; since there is no perceivable fitness in bestowing benefits on one *for another's sake* where there is no union or relation subsisting between them. It is not such a union however as that THE ACTIONS OF EITHER BECOME THOSE OF THE OTHER. That "the scriptures represent believers as *receiving* only the benefits or the effects of Christ's righteousness in justification," is a remark of which I am not able

to perceive the fallacy: nor does it follow that his obedience itself is not imputed to them. Obedience itself may be and is imputed, while its effects only are *imparted*, and consequently *received*. I never met with a person who held the absurd notion of imputed benefits, or imputed punishments; and am inclined to think there never was such a person. Be that however as it may, sin on the one hand, and righteousness on the other, are the proper objects of imputation; but that imputation consists in charging or reckoning them to the account of the party in such a way as to *impart* to him their evil or beneficial effects.

Peter. The doctrine for which I contend, as taught by the apostle Paul, is neither novel, nor more strongly expressed than it has formerly been by authors of eminence.

James. It may be so. We have been told of an old protestant writer who says, that "In Christ, and by him, every true Christian may be called *a fulfiller of the law*:" but I see not why he might not as well have added, every true Christian may be said to have been slain, and if not to have redeemed himself by his own blood, yet to be worthy of all that blessing and honour and glory that shall be conferred upon him in the world to come. What do you think of Dr. Crisp's Sermons? Has he not carried your principles to an extreme?

Peter. I cordially agree with Witsius, as to the impropriety of calling Christ *a sinner, truly a sinner, the greatest of sinners*, &c. yet I am far from disapproving of what Dr. Crisp, and some others, *meant* by those exceptionable expressions.

James. If a Christian may be called a *fulfiller of the law*, on account of Christ's obedience being imputed to him, I see not why Christ may not be called *a transgressor of the law*, on account of our disobedience being imputed to him. Persons and things *should be called what they are.* As to the meaning of Dr. Crisp, I am very willing to think he had no ill design: but my concern is with the meaning which his words convey to his readers. He considers God, in charging our sins on Christ, and accounting his righteousness to us, as reckoning of things *as they are.* (p. 230.) He contends that Christ was *really* the sinner, or guilt could not have been laid upon him. (p. 272.) Imputation of sin and right-

eousness with him, is literally and actually A TRANSFER OF CHARACTER; and it is the object of his reasoning to persuade his believing hearers that from henceforward Christ is the sinner, and not they. "Hast thou been an idolater," says he, "a blasphemer, a despiser of God's word, a profaner of his name and ordinances, a thief, a liar, a drunkard—If thou hast part in Christ, *all these transgressions of thine become actually the transgressions of Christ, and so cease to be thine*; *and thou ceasest to be a transgressor from the time they were laid upon Christ, to the last hour of thy life:* so that now thou art *not* an idolater, a persecutor, a thief, a liar, &c.—thou art *not* a sinful person. Reckon whatever sin you commit, when you have part in Christ, you are all that Christ was, and Christ is all that you were. (p. 270.)

If the *meaning* of this passage be true and good, I see nothing exceptionable in the expressions. All that can be said is, that the writer explicitly states his principle, and avows its legitimate consequences. I believe the principle to be false. (1.) Because neither sin nor righteousness are *in themselves* transferrable. The act and deed of one person may *affect* another in many ways, but cannot possibly become his act and deed. (2.) Because the scriptures uniformly declare Christ to be sinless, and believers to be sinful creatures. (3.) Because believers themselves have in all ages *confessed* their sins, and applied to the mercy-seat for *forgiveness.* They never plead such an union as shall render their sins not theirs, but Christ's; but merely such an one as affords ground to apply for pardon in *his name* or *for his sake:* not as worthy claimants, but as unworthy supplicants.

Whatever reasonings we may adopt, there are certain times in which *conscience* will bear witness, that notwithstanding the imputation of our sins to Christ, *we are actually the sinners;* and I should have thought that no good man could have gravely gone about to overturn its testimony. Yet this is what Dr. Crisp has done. "Believers *think*," says he, "that they find their transgressions in their own consciences, and they *imagine* that there is a sting of this poison still behind, wounding them: but beloved, if this principle be received for a truth, that God hath laid thine iniquities on Christ, how can thy transgressions, belonging to Christ,

be found in thy heart and conscience?—Is thy conscience Christ?" (p. 69)

Perhaps no man has gone further than Dr. Crisp in his attempts at consistency; and admitting his principle, that imputation consists in a transfer of character, I do not see who can dispute his conclusions. To have been perfectly consistent, however, he should have proved that all the confessions and lamentations of believers, recorded in scripture, arose from their being under the *mistake* which he labours to rectify; that is, *thinking* sin did not cease to be theirs, even when under the fullest persuasion that the Lord would not impute it to them, but would graciously cover it by the righteousness of his Son.

John. I hope, my brethren, that what has been said in this free conversation will be reconsidered with candour; and that you will neither of you impute designs or consequences to the other which are not avowed.

CONVERSATION II.

ON SUBSTITUTION.

John. I THINK, Brother Peter, you expressed, at the beginning of our last conversation, a strong suspicion that Brother James denied *the substitution of Christ*, as well as the proper imputation of sin and righteousness. What has passed on the latter subject would probably tend either to confirm or remove your suspicions respecting the former.

Peter. I confess I was mistaken in some of my suspicions. I consider our friend as a good man; but am far from being satisfied with what I still understand to be his views on this important subject.

John. It gives me great pleasure to hear the honest concessions of brethren, when they feel themselves in any measure to have gone too far.

Peter. I shall be glad to hear Brother James's statement on *substitution*, and to know whether he considers our Lord in his undertaking as having sustained the character of a *Head*, or *Representative;* and if so, whether the persons for whom he was a substitute were the elect only, or mankind in general.

James. I must acknowledge that on this subject I feel considerably at a loss. I have no consciousness of having ever called the doctrine of substitution in question. On the contrary, my hope of salvation rests upon it; and the sum of my delight, as a minister of the gospel, consists in it. If I know any thing of my own heart, I can say of my Saviour as laying down his life, *for*, or *instead of* sinners, as was said of Jerusalem by the captives; *If I forget* THEE, *let my right hand forget: if I do not remember* THEE, *let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!*

[James here paused, and wept; and both John and Peter wep with him. After recovering himself a little, he proceeded as follows:]

I have always considered the denial of this doctrine as being the essence of Socinianism. I could not have imagined that any person whose hope of acceptance with God rests, not on any goodness in himself, but entirely on the righteousness of Christ, imputed to him *as if it were his own*, would have been accounted to disown his substitution. But perhaps my dear brother (for such I feel him to be, notwithstanding our differences) may include in his ideas on this subject, that Christ was so our *head* and *representative*, as that what he did and suffered, we did and suffered in him. [To this Peter assented.] If no more were meant by this, resumed James, than that what he did and suffered is graciously accepted on our behalf *as if it were ours*, I freely, as I have said before, acquiesce in it. But I do not believe, and can hardly persuade myself that Brother Peter believes, the obedience and sufferings of Christ to be to ours, as that we can properly be said to have obeyed and suffered.

Christ was and is our *head*, and we are his members: the union between him and us, however, is not in all respects the same as that which is between the head and the members of the natural body: for that would go to explain away all distinct consciousness and accountableness on our part.

As to the term *representative*, if no more be meant by it than that Christ so personated us as to die in our stead, that we, believing in him, should not die, I have nothing to object to it. But I do not believe that Christ was so our representative, as that what he did and suffered, we did and suffered; and so became meritorious, or deserving of the divine favour. But I feel myself in a wide field, and must intreat your indulgence while I take up so much of the conversation.

Peter and John. Go on, and state your sentiments without apology.

James. I apprehend then, that many important mistakes have arisen from considering the interposition of Christ under the notion of *paying a debt*. The blood of Christ is indeed the *price* of

our redemption, or that for the sake of which we are delivered from the curse of the law: but this metaphorical language, as well as that of *head and members*, may be carried too far, and may lead us into many errors. In cases of debt and credit among men, where a surety undertakes to *represent* the debtor, from the moment his undertaking is accepted, the debtor is free, and may claim his liberty, not as a matter of favour, at least on the part of the creditor, but of strict justice. Or should the undertaking be unknown to him for a time, yet as soon as he knows it, he may demand his discharge, and it may be, think himself hardly treated by being kept in bondage so long after his debt had been actually paid. But who in their sober senses will imagine this to be analogous to the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ? Sin is a debt only in a metaphorical sense: properly speaking, it is a *crime*, and satisfaction for it requires to be made, not on pecuniary, but on moral principles. If Philemon had accepted of that part of Paul's offer which respected property, and had placed so much to his account as he considered Onesimus to have "owed" him, he could not have been said to have *remitted* his debt; nor would Onesimus have had to thank him for remitting it. But it is supposed of Onesimus that he might not only be in debt to his master, but have "wronged" him. Perhaps he had embezzled his goods, corrupted his children, or injured his character. Now for Philemon to accept of that part of the offer, were very different from the other. In the one case he would have accepted of a pecuniary representative, in the other of a moral one; that is, of a mediator. The satisfaction in the one case would annihilate the idea of remission; but not in the other. Whatever satisfaction Paul might give to Philemon respecting the wound inflicted upon his character and honour as the head of a family, it would not supersede the necessity of pardon being sought by the offender, and freely bestowed by the offended.

The reason of this difference is easily perceived. Debts are transferrable; but crimes are not. A third person may cancel the one; but he can only obliterate the *effects* of the other; the *desert* of the criminal remains. The *debtor* is accountable to his creditor as a *private* individual, who has power to accept of a sure-

ty, or, if he please, to remit the whole without any satisfaction. In the one case he would be just; in the other merciful: but no place is afforded by either of them for the *combination* of justice and mercy in the same proceeding. The *criminal* on the other hand, is amenable to the magistrate, or to the head of a family, as a *public* person, and who, especially if the offence be capital, cannot remit the punishment without invading law and justice, nor in the ordinary discharge of his office, admit of a third person to stand in his place. In extraordinary cases, however, extraordinary expedients are resorted to. A satisfaction may be made to law and justice, as to the *spirit* of them, while the *letter* is dispensed with. The well-known story of Zaleucus, the Grecian lawgiver, who consented to lose one of his eyes to spare one of his son's eyes, who by transgressing the law had subjected himself to the loss of both, is an example. Here, as far as it went, *justice and mercy were combined* in the same act: and had the satisfaction been much fuller than it was, so full that the authority of the law, instead of being weakened, should have been abundantly magnified and honoured, still it had been *been perfectly consistent with free forgiveness.*

Finally: In the case of the debtor, satisfaction being once accepted, justice *requires* his complete discharge: but in that of the criminal, where satisfaction is made to the wounded honour of the law, and the authority of the lawgiver, justice, though it admits of his discharge, yet no otherwise *requires* it than as it may have been matter of promise to the substitute.

I do not mean to say that cases of this sort afford a competent representation of redemption by Christ. Thatis a work which not only ranks with extraordinary interpositions, but which has no parallel: it is a work of God, which leaves all the petty concerns of mortals infinitely behind it. All that comparisons can do, is to give us some idea of the *principle* on which it proceeds.

If the following passage of our admired Milton were considered as the language of the law of innocence, it would be inaccurate—

"———————— Man disobeying,
. . . . . .
He with his whole posterity must die:
Die he, or justice must; unless for him
Some other, able, and as willing, pay
The rigid satisfaction, death for death."

Abstractly considered this is true; but it is not expressive of what was the revealed law of innocence. The law made no such condition, or provision; nor was it indifferent to the lawgiver who should suffer, the sinner, or another on his behalf. The language of the law to the transgressor was not *thou shalt die, or some one on thy behalf;* but simply *thou shalt die*: and had it literally taken its course, every child of man must have perished. The sufferings of Christ in our stead, therefore, are not a punishment inflicted in the ordinary course of distributive justice; but an extraordinary interposition of infinite wisdom and love: not contrary to, but rather above the law, deviating from the letter, but more than preserving the spirit of it. Such, brethren, as well as I am able to explain them, are my views of the substitution of Christ.

Peter. The objection of our so stating the substitution of Christ, as to leave no room for the free pardon of sin, has been often made by those who avowedly reject his satisfaction; but for any who really consider his death as an atonement for sin, and as essential to the ground of a sinner's hope, to employ the objection against us, is very extraordinary, and must, I presume, proceed from inadvertency.

James. If it be so, I do not perceive it. The grounds of the objection have been stated as clearly and as fully as I am able to state them.

John. What are your ideas, Brother James, with respect to the persons for whom Christ died as a substitute? Do you consider them as the elect only, or mankind in general?

James. Were I asked concerning the gospel when it is introduced into a country, *For whom was it sent?* if I had respect only to the revealed will of God, I should answer, It is sent for men, not as elect, or non-elect, but as *sinners.* It is written and preached

"that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through his name." But if I had respect to the appointment of God, with regard to its application, I should say, If the divine conduct in this instance accord with what it has been in other instances, he hath visited that country, to "*take out of them* a people for his name."

In like manner, concerning the death of Christ, if I speak of it irrespective of the purpose of the Father and the Son as to the objects who should be saved by it; referring merely to what it is in itself sufficient for, and declared in the gospel to be adapted to, I should think I answered the question in a scriptural way in saying, It was *for sinners as sinners*. But if I have respect to the purpose of the Father in giving his Son to die, and to the design of Christ in laying down his life, I should answer, It was *for his elect only*.

In the *first* of these views, I find the apostles and primitive ministers (leaving the consideration of God's secret purpose as a matter belonging to himself, not to them,) addressing themselves to sinners without distinction, and holding forth the sacrifice of Christ as a ground of faith to all men. On this principle, the servants sent forth to bid guests to the marriage-supper, were directed to invite them, saying, *Come* FOR *all things are ready*. On this principle the ambassadors of Christ besought sinners to be reconciled to God; FOR, said they, *he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him*.

In the *last* view, I find the apostles ascribing to the purpose and discriminating grace of God all their success: *as many as were ordained to eternal life believed;* teaching believers also to ascribe every thing that they were, or hoped to be, to the same cause; addressing them as having been before the foundation of the world *beloved* and *chosen* of God; the *children* or *sons*, whom it was the design of Christ, in becoming incarnate, to bring to glory; the *church* of God, which he purchased with his own blood, and for which he gave himself, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

If the substitution of Christ consist in his dying *for* or *instead of* others, *that they should not die*, this, as comprehending the designed end to be answered by his death, is strictly applicable to none but the elect: for, whatever ground there is for sinners, as sinners, to believe and be saved, it never was the purpose or design of Christ to impart faith to any other than those who were given him of the Father. He therefore did not die with the intent that any others should not die.

Whether I can perfectly reconcile these statements with each other, or not, I embrace them as being both plainly taught in the scriptures. I confess, however, I do not at present perceive their inconsistency. If I be not greatly mistaken, what apparent contradiction may attend them arises chiefly from that which has been already mentioned; namely, the considering of Christ's substitution as an affair between *a creditor and a debtor*, or carrying the metaphor to an extreme. In that view, the sufferings of Christ would require to be exactly proportioned to the nature and number of the sins which were laid upon him; and if more sinners had been saved, or those who are saved had been greater sinners than they are, he must have borne a proportionable increase of suffering. To correspond with pecuniary satisfactions this must undoubtedly be the case. I do not know that any writer has so stated things; but am persuaded that such ideas are at the foundation of a large part of the reasonings on that side of the subject.

In atonement, or satisfaction for *crime*, things do not proceed on this calculating principle. It is true there was a *designation* of the sacrifices offered up by Hezekiah: they were offered, not only for Judah, but for those that remained of the ten tribes: *for so the king commanded, that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made* FOR ALL ISRAEL. But the sacrifices themselves were the same for both, as they would have been for one, and required to be the same for one, as they were for both. It was their *designation* only that made the difference.

Thus I conceive it is in respect of the sacrifice of Christ. If fewer had been saved than are saved, to be consistent with justice it required to be by the same perfect atonement; and if more had been saved than are, even the whole human race, there needed

no other. But if the satisfaction of Christ was *in itself* sufficient for the whole world, there is no farther propriety in asking, "Whose sins were imputed to Christ? or, For whom did he die as a substitute?" than as it is thereby inquired, Who were the persons whom he intended finally to save?

That which is equally necessary for few as for many, must, in its own nature, be equally sufficient for many as for few; and could not proceed upon the principle of the sins of some being laid on Christ rather than on others, any otherwise than as it was the *design* of the Father and the Son, through one all-sufficient medium, to pardon the elect, while the rest are, notwithstanding, left to perish in their sins.

It seems to me as consonant with truth to say that a certain number of Christ's acts of obedience become ours, as that a certain number of our sins become his. In the former case his one undivided obedience, stamped as it is with divinity, affords a ground of justification to any number of believers: in the latter, his one atonement, stamped also as it is with divinity is sufficient for the pardon of any number of sins, or sinners. Yet as Christ laid not his life down but *by covenant;* as the elect were given him to be the purchase of his blood, or the fruit of the travail of his soul, he had respect, in all he did and suffered, to this recompense of reward. Their salvation was the joy that was set before him. It was for the covering of *their* transgressions that he became obedient unto death. To *them* his substitution was the same *in effect* as if their sins had by number and measure been literally imparted to him.

I am not aware that any principle which I imbibe is inconsistent with Christ's laying down his life *by covenant*, or with his being the *Surety* of that covenant, pledging himself for the *certain* accomplishment of whatever he undertook; as that all that were given him should come to him, should not be lost, but raised up at the last day, and be presented without spot, and blameless. All this I consider as included in the design of the Father and the Son, with respect to the application of the atonement.

John. I have heard it objected to your views of the *sufficiency* of the atonement, to this effect—"How does this principle afford

a ground for general invitations, if the *design* was confined to his elect people? If the benefits of his death were never *intended* for the non-elect, is it not just as inconsistent to invite them to partake of them, as if there were a want of sufficiency? This explanation therefore seems only to be shifting the difficulty."

James. Pharoah was exhorted to let Israel go; and had he complied, he had saved his own life, and that of a great number of his people; yet, all things considered, it was not God's intention to save Pharoah's life, nor that of the Egyptians. And is there no difference between this, and his being exhorted under a promise in which the object promised had no existence?

It is a fact that the scriptures rest the general invitations of the gospel upon the atonement of Christ.* But if there were not a sufficiency in the atonement for the salvation of sinners without distinction, how could the ambassadors of Christ beseech them to be reconciled to God, and that from the consideration of his having been made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him? What would you think of the fallen angels being invited to be reconciled to God, from the consideration of an atonement having been made for fallen *men?* You would say, It is inviting them to partake of a benefit which *has no existence*, the obtaining of which, therefore, is *naturally impossible*. Upon the supposition of the atonement being insufficient for the salvation of any more than are actually saved by it, the non-elect, with respect to a being reconciled to God through it, are in the same state as the fallen angels; that is, the thing is not only morally, but *naturally impossible*. But if there be an objective fulness in the atonement of Christ, sufficient for any number of sinners, were they to believe in him; there is no other impossibility in the way of any man's salvation to whom the gospel comes, at least, than what arises from the state of his own mind. The intention of God not to remove this impossibility, and so not to save him, is a purpose to withhold not only that which he was not obliged to bestow, but that which is never represented in the scriptures a sneces-sary to the consistency of exhortations or invitations.

* 2 Cor. v. 19—21. Matt. xxii. 4. John iii. 16.

I do not deny that there is *difficulty* in these statements; but it belongs to the general subject of reconciling the purposes of God with the agency of man: whereas in the other case, God is represented as inviting sinners to partake of what has no existence, and which, therefore, is physically impossible. The one, while it ascribes the salvation of the believer in every stage of it to mere grace, renders the unbeliever inexcusable; which the other, I conceive, does not. In short, we must either acknowledge an objective fulness in Christ's atonement, sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to believe in him; or, in opposition to scripture and common sense, confine our invitations to believe, to such persons as have believed already.

John. May I ask you, Brother Peter, whether, on a review of what has passed, you consider Brother James as denying the doctrines of *imputation* and *substitution*, or either of them?

Peter. Though I consider Brother James's statements as containing various mistakes; and though I am exceedingly averse from the necessary consequences of certain tenets, which, if I rightly understand him, are avowed in them; yet I am now convinced that respecting those doctrines, he did not intend what I supposed he did. It behoves me, therefore, frankly to acknowledge, that I have unintentionally misrepresented his sentiments respecting them, for which I am truly sorry.

John. I hope, Brother James, you are satisfied with this acknowledgment.

James. Perfectly so; and shall be happy to hear Brother Peter's remarks on those particulars in which he may still consider me as in the wrong.

CONVERSATION III.

ON PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

Peter. NOTWITHSTANDING what our Brother James has stated, I am far from being satisfied with his views as they affect the doctrine of *Particular Redemption.* If I understand him, his sentiment may be expressed in this position : THE PARTICULARITY OF THE ATONEMENT CONSISTS IN THE SOVEREIGN PLEASURE OF GOD WITH REGARD TO ITS APPLICATION.

James. I should rather say, THE PARTICULARITY OF REDEMPTION CONSISTS IN THE SOVEREIGN PLEASURE OF GOD WITH REGARD TO THE APPLICATION OF THE ATONEMENT ; *that is, with regard to* THE PERSONS TO WHOM IT SHALL BE APPLIED.

John. It is to be understood then, I presume, that you both believe the doctrine of particular redemption, and that the only question between you is, wherein it consists ?

James. So I understand it.

Peter. I consider the afore-mentioned position as merely a reconciling expedient, or compromise between principles which can never be reconciled.

James. I am not conscious of embracing it for any such purpose —but let me hear your objections against it.

Peter. It places the particularity of redemption in application. I understand, indeed, that by application you include, not only what the New Testament denominates *receiving the atonement—the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*—and *faith in his blood ;* but also the *absolute intention* of Christ in his death to save all those who shall be finally happy. But, notwithstanding the unauthorized latitude of meaning which, to render the position more

plausible, is here claimed for a particular term, various and cogent reasons may be urged against it. Among others it confounds the atonement itself, with its application to the sinner. Whereas, though the former completely ascertain the latter, yet, not being the same fruit of divine favour, they must not be identified. The term application always supposes the *existence* of whatever is applied. The atonement, therefore, must be considered as existing, either actually, or in a divine decree, before it can be applied to the sinner. The application of a thing to any person, or for any purpose, ought not to be confounded with the thing itself. Hence, in former times, hardly any distinction was more common among theological writers, than that between what they denominated the *impetration* and the *application* of redemption. To represent the *intention* of Christ in his death to save Paul, for instance, and not Judas, under the notion of *applying* the atonement to the one and not to the other, is to me, at least, a perfectly novel sense of the word application, and was, I presume, adopted to meet the necessities of this hypothesis.

James. The whole of what you have said rests upon a mistake at the outset. You say, the position in question "places the particularity of redemption IN APPLICATION." Whereas, if you recollect yourself, you will find that it places it IN THE SOVEREIGN PLEASURE OF GOD WITH REGARD TO APPLICATION. The difference between this and the other is as great as that between election and vocation. Instead of my confounding redemption or atonement, therefore, with application, I have just cause to complain of you for having confounded application with the sovereign pleasure of God respecting it, and for having loaded me with the consequences.

Peter. But have you never made use of the term *application*, so as to include the divine *intention*?

James. I am not aware of having done so; but whether I have or not, you were not animadverting on what I may have said at other times, but on the position which you yourself had stated, which position affirms the very opposite of what you allege. Allowing you to animadvert, however, on other words than those

contained in the position, and admitting that I may have spoken or written in the manner you allege, still it has been merely to distinguish what the death of Christ is *in itself sufficient for*, from what it was *the design of the Father and the Son actually to accomplish by it*. This distinction is neither novel nor liable to the objection of confounding the impetration of redemption with its application. I have no other meaning, that I am aware of, than that of Dr. Owen in the following passage: "Sufficient, we say, was the sacrifice of Christ for the redemption of the whole world, and for the expiation of all the sins of all and every man in the world. This sufficiency of his sacrifice hath a two-fold rise. First: The dignity of the person that did offer, and was offered. Secondly: The greatness of the pain he endured, by which he was able to bear, and did undergo the whole curse of the law, and wrath of God due to sin. And this sets forth *the innate, real, true worth and value of the blood-shedding of Jesus Christ*. This is its own true internal perfection and sufficiency. That it should be APPLIED unto any, made a *price* for them, and become *beneficial* to them, according to the worth that is in it, is *external* to it, doth not arise from it, but merely depends upon the intention and will of God."

Peter. Intention enters into the nature of atonement. Christ was voluntary in his sufferings, and his being so, was essential to his death as a sacrifice and an atonement. His death, detached from these considerations, would be merely that of a martyr. It was the effect of the highest degree of love, and of the kindest possible intention respecting the objects beloved; for otherwise it might well be demanded, To what purpose this *waste* of love?

James. Intention of some kind doubtless does enter into the essence of Christ's laying down his life a sacrifice: but that it should be beneficial to this person, rather than to that, appears to me, as Dr. Owen expresses it, "external to it, and to depend entirely on the will of God." And as to a *waste* of love, we might as well attribute a waste of goodness to the divine providence in its watering rocks and seas, as well as fruitful valleys, with the showers of heaven; or to our Lord for his commissioning his apostles to

preach the gospel to every creature, while he never expected any others to believe and be saved by it than those who were *ordained* to eternal life. It accords with the general conduct of God to impart his favours with a kind of profusion, which to the mind of man, that sees only one or two ends to be answered by them. may have the appearance of waste : but when all things are brought to their intended issue, it will be found that God has done nothing in vain.

John. Placing the particularity of redemption, as you do, in the sovereign pleasure of God with regard to the application of the atonement, or the persons to whom it shall be applied ; wherein is the difference between that doctrine and the doctrine of election ?

James. I do not consider particular redemption as being so much a doctrine of itself. as a branch of the great doctrine of election, which runs through all God's works of grace. If this branch of election had not been more opposed than others, I reckon we should no more have thought of applying the term *particular* to it, than to vocation, justification, or glorification. The idea applies to these as well as to the other. *Whom* he did foreknow he did predestinate : *whom* he did predestinate, he called : *whom* he called, he justified ; and *whom* he justified, he glorified.

John. This would seem to agree with the Apostle's account of spiritual blessings in his Epistle to the Ephesians : *He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,* ACCORDING AS HE HATH CHOSEN US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.

Peter. I have some questions which I wish to put to Brother James on the difference which he appears to make between atonement and redemption. If I understand him, he considers the latter as the *effect* of the former.

James. There are few terms, whether in the scriptures or elsewhere, that are always used in the same sense. *Reconciliation* sometimes means abeing *actually in friendship with God, through faith in the blood of Christ* : but when used synonymously with atonement it denotes the *satisfaction of justice only,* or the

opening of a way by which mercy may be exercised consistently with righteousness. In both these senses the word occurs in Rom. v, 10. *For if when we were enemies we* WERE RECONCILED *to God by the death of his Son ; much more* BEING RECONCILED, *we shall be saved by his life.* On this passage Dr. Guyse very properly remarks, " *Reconciled to God by the death of his Son,* in the first clause seems to relate to Christ's having worked out our reconciliation, or completed all in a way of merit by his death that was necessary to appease the wrath of God, and make way for the riches of his grace to be communicated to us in full consistence with the honour of all his perfections, and of his law and government, which the Apostle had called (verse 6, and 8,) *dying for the ungodly*, and *dying for us :* but *being reconciled*, in the last clause, seems to relate to the reconciliation's taking effect upon us, or, to our being brought into a state of actual reconciliation and peace with God, through faith in Christ's blood, which the Apostle had spoken of in verse 1, and 9, and which, in the verse after this, is called *receiving the atonement.*"—Thus also the term *redemption* is sometimes put for the *price* by which we are redeemed ; namely the blood-shedding of Christ. In this sense it appears to be used by the Apostle in Rom. iii. 24. *Being justified freely by his grace, through the* REDEMPTION *that is in Jesus Christ.* To be justified *through his redemption* is the same thing, I should think, as being *justified by his blood.* But the term properly and ordinarily signifies, not that for the sake of which we are delivered from the curse of the law, but the deliverance itself. Viewing reconciliation, or atonement, as a satisfaction to divine justice, and redemption as the deliverance of the sinner, the latter appears to me to be an *effect* of the former.

Peter. I am far from being convinced that redemption is an effect of atonement, any more than that atonement is an effect of redemption : both are the immediate effects of Christ's death, viewed in different points of light.

James. I freely admit that both are effects of Christ's death; but in such order as that one is the consequence of the other. I can conceive of the deliverance of the criminal arising from the

satisfaction made to the judge; but not of satisfaction to the judge arising from the deliverance of the criminal.

Peter. To view the atonement as merely a satisfaction to divine justice, or as a *medium* by which mercy may be exercised consistently with the divine perfections, without considering sinners as *actually reconciled to God* by it, is to retain little if any thing more than the *name* of atonement.

James. I see no ground for calling that which was wrought for us while we were yet enemies *actual* reconciliation. Actual reconciliation appears to me, as it did to Dr. Guyse, to consist in that which is accomplished through faith, or as receiving the atonement. The reconciliation which is synonymous with atonement is expressed in 2 Cor. v. 18. *All things are of God, who hath* RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF *by Jesus Christ.* But this is not supposed by the Apostle, important as it was, to have brought sinners into a state of *actual* friendship with God: for if so, there had been no occasion for "the ministry of reconciliation," and for "beseeching sinners *to be reconciled* to him." Nor do I see how a state of *actual* reconciliation could consist with the uniform language of the New Testament concerning unbelievers, whether elect, or non-elect, that they are under *condemnation.* I never understood that you held with justification before believing: but *actual* reconciliation seems to amount to this. Neither have I understood that you have ever attempted to explain away the duty of ministers to beseech sinners to be reconciled to God. On the contrary, if I mistake not, you have pleaded for it. I am surprised, therefore, at your speaking of them as being *actually* reconciled to God while they are yet enemies.

John. What are your ideas brother James, of that *reconciliation* which was effected while we were yet enemies.

James. I conceive it to be that *satisfaction to the divine justice* by virtue of which nothing pertaining to the moral government of God hinders any sinner from returning to him; and that it is upon this ground that sinners are indefinitely invited so to do. Herein I conceive is the great difference at present between their state and that of the fallen angels. To them God is absolutely inaccessible; no invitations whatever being addressed to them, nor

the gospel preached to them: but it is not so with fallen men. Besides this, as Christ gave himself for us *that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people*, I consider the actual reconciliation of the elect in the fulness of time as hereby *ascertained*. It was promised him, as the reward of his sufferings, that he should *see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied*.

Peter. Is there any thing in the atonement, or promised to it, which infallibly ascertains its application to *all* those for whom it was made?

James. If by this you mean all for whose salvation it was *sufficient*, I answer, There is not. But if you mean all for whose salvation it was *intended*, I answer, There is.

Peter. You consider the PRINCIPAL DESIGN of our Lord's atonement to be the manifestation of God's hatred to sin, in order to render the exercise of mercy consistent with justice: but, though this idea is supposed, yet it is far from being the first, the most prominent, the characteristic idea of our Lord's death: the grand idea suggested to an enlightened mind by the atonement of Christ is not God's hatred to sin but his love to sinners.

James. I hope we shall none of us pretend to be more enlightened than the apostle Paul, and I am mistaken if he does not suggest the idea against which you militate. He represents God as *setting forth* his Son as a *propitiation* to *declare*, or DEMONSTRATE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE REMISSION OF SINS. It is marvellous to me that I should be suspected of holding up God's hatred of sin to the disparagement of his love to sinners; when the former is supposed to have been manifested to *prepare the way for the latter*. Were I to say, The PRINCIPAL DESIGN of David in restoring Absalom at the instance of Joab, rather than by sending for him himself, was that even in pardoning the young man he might show some displeasure against his sin, and save his own honour as the head of a family and of a nation, I should not be far from the truth. Yet I might be told, The grand, the prominent, the characteristic idea suggested by the king's consent was *love*; for his *soul longed to go forth to Absalom*. Love to Absalom doubtless accounts for

David's *desiring his return* : but love to righteousness accounts for his desiring it *in that particular manner.* So if the question were, Why did God give his Son to die for sinners, *rather than leave them to perish in their sins?* the answer would be, Because he *loved them.* But if the question be, Why did he give his Son to be an atonement for sinners, *rather than save them without one* ? the answer would be, Because he loved righteousness, and hated iniquity.

Peter. On the principle I oppose, the love of God in *applying* the atonement is much greater than in giving his Son to *be* an atonement, since the latter is mere *general benevolence* ; but the former is *particular* and *effectual.*

James. You should rather have said, The love of God is greater in giving his Son to be a sacrifice *in respect of those for whose salvation it was his pleasure to make it effectual*, than in merely giving him, as he is said to have done, to some who never received him.* If there was a particularity of design in the gift of Christ, it cannot be ascribed merely to general benevolence. And *so far as it is so*, we have no right to depreciate it on account of its not issuing in the salvation of sinners in general. It was no diminution to the love of God to Israel in bringing them out of Egypt, that the great body of them transgressed and perished in the wilderness : nor could it be truly said that the bringing of Caleb and Joshua into the land of promise was a greater expression of love than that which had been bestowed upon them, and the whole body of their cotemporaries, in liberating them from the Egyptian yoke. And let me intreat you to consider whether your principles would not furnish an apology for the unbelieving Israelites.— There was little or no love in God's delivering us, unless he intended withal to prevent our sinning against him, and actually to bring us to the good land : but there was no good land for us— Would to God we had died in Egypt!' To this, however, an apostle would answer, *They could not enter in because of unbelief.* And as this language was written for the warning of professing Christians, whose inclination to relinquish the gospel resembled

* John vi. 32. i. 11.

that of their fathers to return into Egypt, we are warranted to conclude from it, that though the salvation of the saved be entirely of grace, yet the failure of others will be ascribed to themselves. They shall not have the consolation to say, 'Our salvation was a *natural impossibility*:' or, if they were to utter such language, they would be repelled by scripture and conscience, which unite in declaring *They could not enter in because of unbelief.*

Peter. I remember an old nonconformist minister says, "If any man be bound to believe Christ's satisfaction sufficient to justify him for whom it was never paid, he is bound to believe an untruth. God will never make it any man's duty to rest for salvation on that blood that was never shed for him, or that satisfaction that was never made for him."

James. This reasonining of the old nonconformist may, for ought I know, be just on his principles; but it is not so on mine. If satisfaction was made on the principle of debtor and creditor, and that which was paid was just of sufficient value to liquidate a given number of sins and to redeem a given number of sinners, and no more; it should seem that it could not be the duty of any but the elect, nor theirs till it was revealed to them that they were of the elect, to rely upon it: for *wherefore should we set our eyes on that which is not?* But if there be such a fulness in the satisfaction of Christ as is sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, were the whole world to believe in him; and if the particularity of redemption lie only in the purpose or sovereign pleasure of God to render it effectual to some rather than to others, no such consequence will follow: or if it do, it will also follow, that divine predestination and human accountableness are utterly inconsistent, and therefore that we must either relinquish the former in favour of Arminianism, or give up the latter to theAntinomians. But though the ideas of my much respected brother, on the subject of redemption, cannot be very different from those of his old nonconformist, yet I should not have supposed he would have adopted his reasoning as his own.

Peter. Why not?

James. Because it is your avowed persuasion *that sinners* AS SINNERS *are invited to believe in Christ for salvation.* Thus you

have interpreted the invitations in Isa. lv. 1—7. and various others; carefully and justly guarding against the notion of their being addressed to *renewed*, or as some call them, *sensible sinners*. Thus also you interpret 2 Cor. v. 20. of God's beseeching sinners by the ministry of the word to be reconciled to him. But your old friend would tell you, that God will never invite a sinner to rest for salvation on that blood that was never shed for him, or on that satisfaction that was never made for him. I should have thought too, after all that you have said of the warrant which sinners *as sinners* have to believe in Christ, you would not have denied it to be their *duty*, nor have adopted a mode of reasoning which, if followed up to its legitimate consequences, will compel you to maintain either the possibility of knowing our election before we believe in Christ, or that in our first reliance on his righteousness for acceptance with God we are guilty of presumption.

John. I conceive, my dear brethren, that you have each said as much on these subjects as is likely to be for edification. Permit me, after having heard and candidly attended to all that has passed between you, to assure you both of my esteem, and to declare that in my opinion the difference between you ought not to prevent your feeling towards and treating each other as brethren. You are agreed in all the great doctrines of the gospel; as the necessity of an atonement, the ground of acceptance with God, salvation by grace only, &c. &c. and with respect to particular redemption, you both admit the thing, and I would hope both hold it in a way consistent with the practice of the primitive ministers; or if it be not altogether so, that you will reconsider the subject when you are by yourselves. The greater part of those things wherein you seem to differ, may be owing either to a difference in the manner of expressing yourselves, or to the affixing of consequences to a principle which yet are unperceived by him that holds it. I do not accuse either of you with doing so intentionally: but principles and their consequences are so suddenly associated in the mind, that when we hear a person avow the former, we can scarcely forbear immediately attributing to him the latter. If a principle be proposed

to us *for acceptance*, it is right to weigh the consequences: but when forming our judgment of the *person* who holds it, we should attach nothing to him but what he perceives and avows. If by an exchange of ideas you can come to a better understanding, it will afford me pleasure: meanwhile it is some satisfaction that your visit to me has not tended to widen but considerably to diminish your differences. Brethren, there are many adversaries of the gospel around you, who would rejoice to see you at variance: let there be no strife between you. You are both erring mortals; but both, I trust, the sincere friends of the Lord Jesus. Love one another!

ANSWER TO THREE QUERIES

PROPOSED TO THE AUTHOR.

"1. SINCE, on the present constitution of things, men never had a disposition to love and serve God, nor can it be produced by any circumstances in which they can be placed; how can they be accountable for what they never had, and without divine influence never can have?

"2. If it be said, that man is accountable from his powers and constitution, and therefore that God requires of him perfect obedience and love as the result of his possessing a moral nature; still how is it consistent with the goodness of God, to produce accountable beings in circumstances wherein their rebellion is certain, and then punish them for it?

"3. If the reply to these difficulties be founded on the principle, that from what we see, we cannot conceive of a constitution, which hath not either equal or greater difficulties in it; is it not a confession, that we cannot meet the objections and answer them in the direct way, but are obliged to acknowledge that the government of God is too imperfectly understood by us, to know the principles on which it proceeds?

"The above queries are not the effect of any unbelief of the great leading doctrines of the gospel; but as every thinking man has his own way of settling such moral difficulties, you will confer a favour on me if you will state how you meet and answer them in your own mind."

ANSWER.

If the querist imagines that we profess to have embraced a system which answers all difficulties, he should be reminded that we

profess no such thing. If it answer all *sober* and *modest* objections, that is as much as ought to be expected. The querist would do well to consider whether he be not off Christian ground; and whether he might not as well inquire as follows: How could it consist with the goodness of God, knowing as he did the part that men and angels would act, to create them? Or, if he had brought them into being, yet when they had transgressed, why did he not blot them out of existence? Or, if they who had sinned must needs exist and be punished, yet why was it not confined to them? Why must the human race be brought into being under such circumstances?

I remember, when a boy of about ten years old, I was bathing with a number of other boys near a mill-dam, and the hat of one of my companions falling into the stream, I had the hardihood, without being able to swim, to attempt to recover it. I went so deep that the waters began to run into my mouth, and to heave my feet from the ground. At that instant the millers seeing my danger, set up a loud cry, "Get back! get back! get back! I did so, and that was all.—What the millers said to me, modesty, sobriety, and right reason, say to all such objectors as the above, 'Get back! get back! get back! You are beyond your depth! It is enough for you to know that God HATH created men and angels, and this notwithstanding he knew what would be the result; that he HATH NOT blotted them out of existence; and that he HATH NOT prevented the propagation of the human race in their fallen state. These being FACTS which cannot be disputed, you ought to take it for granted, whether you can understand it or not, that they are consistent with righteousness; for the contrary is no other than REPLYING AGAINST GOD.'

Whatever objections may be alleged against an hypothesis, or the meaning of a text of scripture, on the ground of its inconsistency with the divine perfections; yet in matters of acknowledged *fact*, they are inadmissible. If God HATH DONE thus and thus, it is not for us to object that it is inconsistent with his character; but to suspect our own understanding, and conclude that if we knew the whole, we should see it to be right. Paul invariably takes it for granted that *whatever God doth is right:* nor will he dispute with any man

on a contrary principle, but cuts him short in this manner: *Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid!* It was enough for him that God hath said to Moses, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.* This, as if he should say, is the FACT: *He* HATH *mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he* HARDENETH. He knew what would be the heart-risings of the Infidel—*Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?* But does he attempt to answer this objection? No; he repels it as Job did: *He that reproveth God, let him answer it—Nay but, O man, who art thou that* REPLIEST AGAINST GOD? SHALL THE THING FORMED SAY TO HIM THAT FORMED IT, WHY HAST THOU MADE ME THUS?

Let the Querist consider whether his objections be not of the same family as those which were made to the Apostle, and whether they do not admit of the same answer. Is it not *fact*, that though sinners "never had a disposition to love and serve God, and no circumstance in which they can be placed will produce it;" yet *they are accountable creatures and are invariably treated as such in the scriptures?* God requires them to love and serve him just as much as if they were of opposite dispositions, and "finds fault" with the contrary. Instead of allowing for the want of disposition, he constantly charges it as the very thing that provokes his displeasure. Hundreds of proofs might be produced; but I will only refer you to two or three.* It is upon these FACTS that we rest our persuasion; and not upon a supposed perfect comprehension of the divine government, nor yet upon the ground of its "having the fewest difficulties." We say, God *actually* treats the want of disposition not as an excuse, but as a sin; and we take it for granted that *what God does is right*, whether we can comprehend it or not. Howbeit, in this case, it happens that with the testimonies of God accord those of conscience and common sense. Every man's conscience "finds fault" with him for the evils which he commits willingly, or of choice; and, instead of making any allowance for previous aversion, nothing more is necessary to rivet the charge. And with respect to the common sense of mankind in their treatment one of another, what judge, or what

* Jer. vi. 15—19. Matt. xii. 34—37. John viii. 43—47.

jury ever took into consideration the previous aversion of a traitor or a murderer, with a view to the diminishing of his guilt? On the contrary, the tracing of any thing to that origin rivets the charge, and terminates the inquiry. With the united testimony therefore of God, conscience, and common sense on our side, we make light of objections which as to their principle, were repelled by an apostle, and which are retained only in the school of metaphysical infidelity.

A MEDITATION

ON THE

NATURE AND PROGRESSIVENESS OF THE HEAVENLY GLORY.

ONE of the leading characteristics by which the religion of the Bible is distinguished from those systems of philosophy and morality which many would impose upon us in its place, is, that every thing pertaining to it bears a relation to eternity. The object of all other systems is, at best, to form the manners ; but this rectifies the heart. They aspire only to fit men for this world ; but this while it imparts those dispositions which tend more than any thing to promote peace, order, and happiness in society, fixes the affections supremely on God and things above.

That such should be the exclusive property of revealed religion is not surprising, since it is this only that assures us of the existence of an eternal hereafter. If we relinquish this, all beyond the grave is uncertainty, and our attention will of course be confined to the transitory concerns of a few revolving suns. The conclusion of those who doubt the resurrection, ever has been, and will be, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* But believing in the scriptures of truth, immortality opens to our view. This is the seed-time, and eternity the harvest. All that is known of God and done for him in this life, is preparatory to the joy that is set before us.

To this affecting theme, fellow-christians, let us bend our attention. Would we be heavenly-minded ; we must think of what heaven is. Would we set our affections on things above ; we must know them, converse with them, and perceive their superior

value to things on the earth. It is true, when all is done, it is but little we can comprehend. It is a weight of glory which, if let down upon our minds in our present feeble state, would overset them. It did not appear even to an inspired apostle while upon earth, what believers "would be:" but if we can only obtain a few ideas of it, a glimpse of glory through the breakings of interposing clouds, it will more than repay us for the utmost attention. What pains do men take by artificial mediums to descry the heavenly bodies. Every discovery, whether real or imaginary, is to them a source of rapture and delight. Yet they expect no possession in these supposed worlds of wonder. It is not the object which they discover, but the act of discovery, which, by giving birth to a momentary fame, is their reward. And shall we be indifferent towards those blessed realities, in which every thing that we discover is our own, and our own for ever?

Let us first inquire into the NATURE of that blessedness which God hath prepared for them that love him, and then consider its PROGRESSIVE character.

I have no desire to indulge in speculations concerning the place; nor to enter on any curious inquiries how spirits while separate from their bodies can receive or communicate ideas; nor to throw out conjectures upon any thing which God hath not been pleased to reveal. My object is, as far as may be, to collect the *scriptural* account of things, or to ascertain wherein consists that fulness of joy which is at God's right hand, and which will continue to flow, as in rivers of pleasure, for evermore.

The easiest and most satisfactory medium of conception which we have of these things appears, to me, to be furnished by our own *present experience*. The scriptures abundantly teach us, that the blessedness of heaven is the same for substance as that which we now partake of by faith. This is clearly intimated in those passages in which grace is represented as the *earnest* and *foretaste* of glory. Our Saviour is said to have received power to give *eternal life* to as many as were given him. *And* THIS, he adds, IS LIFE ETERNAL, *to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*. To whomsoever therefore Christ gives this knowledge, he gives the earnest of the promised possession, and which, as

to the nature of it, is the same as the possession itself. The promises to them that overcome, in the second and third chapters of the Revelation of John, agree with what is actually experienced in measure in the present world, though expressed in highly figurative language; as the "eating of the tree of life," "partaking of hidden manna," a being "clothed in white raiment," and "made pillars in the temple of God." Were we to read that sublime passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews, without observing its introduction, we should undoubtedly consider it as a description of the heavenly state, and of that only.—"Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven, God the judge of all, the spirits of just men made perfect, Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel!" What can this mean but the very heaven of heavens? Yet the apostle tells the Hebrews that they were already "COME TO" this celestial city, and to all its honours and privileges. On what principle can this be understood but this, that the church below and the church above are one; "the whole family of heaven and earth;" and he that cometh to one branch or part of it, cometh in effect to the whole.

If then we can review the sources of our best and purest joys in this world, or observe those of the saints whose history is recorded in scripture, and only add perfection to them, we have in substance the scriptural idea of heavenly glory. The nature of Canaan's goodly fruits was clearly ascertained by the clusters that were carried into the wilderness.

We have seen already that the grand source of spiritual enjoyment in the present life is the "knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." And what is this but an epitome of the gospel, and the faith of it? To have a just sense of the glory of the Lawgiver and of the Saviour, and of the harmony between them in the salvation of lost sinners; to see every divine perfection as it is manifested in the person and work of Christ; in a word, believingly to contemplate God in a Mediator..... is eternal life! This was the *water* which Christ imparted, and

which, to them who imbibed it, became in them "a well of living water springing up into everlasting life."

Look at the enjoyments of the scripture saints, and see if they did not arise from the same spring that shall supply the city of the living God, even in the heaven of heavens. Every thing that manifested the glory of the divine character was to them a source of enjoyment; and, as all God's other works were wrought in subserviency to the redemption of the church by his Son, this was the theme which above all others engrossed their attention. What was it that filled Abraham's heart with joy? What that eclipsed the world in the esteem of Moses? What that made the tongue of David as the pen of a ready writer? It was Christ. That in the "everlasting covenant," which was all his salvation and all his desire was its containing the promise of Christ. If we find any of the prophets filled with more than usual ardor, it is when Christ is the theme: *Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.—Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.—Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.* It is easy to see in these and similar passages a beam of heavenly glory shining upon the writers. In short, it was eternal life for them to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he *would* send.

What of heaven there was upon earth during the time of our Saviour's ministry consisted of the knowledge of him, and the knowledge of him involved that of the Father who sent him. Who can read the interview between Mary and Elizabeth, or the words of Simeon in the temple, without perceiving that a beam of celestial glory had descended upon them, and raised them above themselves? *My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!—Then took he him up in his arms,*

and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!

And when Jesus commenced his public ministry, what a charming interest was excited among the people. John observing him as he walked, said to two of his disciples, *Behold the Lamb of God!* They immediately follow Jesus. Jesus, turning to them, asks, *What seek ye!* They cannot express all they wish at that time and place; but, desirous of a more intimate acquaintance with him ask, *Where dwellest thou?* The answer was, *Come and see.* And when they had spent the evening with him, one of them (Andrew) goes and finds his brother Simon, and said, *We have found the Messiah!* And he brought him to Jesus. The day following Jesus findeth Philip, and said unto him, *Follow me!* Philip findeth Nathaniel, and said, *we have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph. Can there any good thing*, said Nathanael, *come out of Nazareth?* The answer is, as before, *Come and see.*

The enjoyments of these people was a heaven upon earth: yet at the same time Christ was nothing to unbelievers. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.—But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among them, (and they beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotton of the Father,) full of grace and truth. Thus it was that of his fullness they all received, and grace for grace. In him the invisible God was, in a manner, rendered visible; for he who dwelt in his bosom came down and declared him. In beholding his glory, therefore, they beheld the glory of God, and were partakers in measure of eternal life.*

It is a remarkable saying of our Lord to Nathanael, when his mind was transported with Joy and surprise, *Thou shalt see greater things than these—hereafter you shall see* HEAVEN OPEN, *and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.* The allusion is, I doubt not, to the vision of Jacob at Bethel; and

* John i. 10—16.

what the ladder was to him, namely, a medium on which the angels of God ascended and descended, that Christ would be to his church after his resurrection. I say to *his church;* for though the intimation is given to Nathanael, yet it was not of any thing which he should see in distinction from others, but in common with them. The pronoun is plural: *Verily I say unto* YOU, *hereafter* YOU *shall see the heaven open,* &c. But what a saying is this! When the wrath of God was poured upon a guilty world, it is expressed by this kind of language: *The windows of heaven were opened.* What then can it here denote but that God would in honour of HIM in whom his soul delighted, pour forth a deluge of blessings in his name? Then, when Jesus had said unto his disciples, *Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem;* when thousands of Jews found mercy under a single sermon, and tens of thousands from among the Gentiles partook of the benefits of his death; and when, as the great High Priest of our profession, he had entered into the holy of holies, and consecrated a new and living way for the most intimate communion between God and his people,—then was heaven opened.

The words of our Lord to Nicodemus are also here in point: *No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven.* The connexion of the passage will convince us that a *personal* ascent or descent is out of the question. The meaning appears to be this: No man hath known the mind of God, save he that was always with him, and is still with him, dwelling as in his bosom. Thus the phrase *ascending to heaven* is used in Deut. xxx. 12. and Rom. x. 6. The Greek might seek after wisdom, and the Jew make his boast of God; but no man should be able to find out the wisdom from above, nor discover the way of life, but by coming to Christ, and taking him for his guide. Nicodemus, though a master in Israel, yet while a stranger to Christ, stumbled at the very threshold of the heavenly doctrine. Christ told him of earthly things, namely, the new birth, which was only one of the first principles of true religion, a subject confined to the earth, and which every

babe in grace was acquainted with, and he could not understand it: how then should he climb up as it were into heaven, and discover the mind of God? Christ taught what *he knew*, and they that received not his testimony, were strangers to the kingdom of God; but they that received it, looking to him as the Israelites looked to the brazen serpent in the wilderness, found eternal life.

The prayer of our Savour, in behalf of his followers, shows also that heaven consists in that which has its commencement in this world: *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word*; THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE AS THOU FATHER ART IN ME AND I IN THEE, THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE ONE IN US, *that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* What is heaven but to be of one heart with the Father and with Christ, even as they are one? yet this blessed union is not confined to the heavenly state: it was to take place on earth, and be *visible* to men; how else should the world be convinced by it that Jesus was sent of God? So far then as we enter into the views and pursuits of God and of his Christ, so much we enjoy of heaven; and so far as we come up to this standard in our social and visible character, so much does our conduct tend to convince the world of the reality of religion.

The kingdom of grace, especially the gospel dispensation, is described by Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in language equally applicable to the kingdom of glory, and which, indeed, at first, brings the latter to our thoughts: *As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.*

Once more: The prayer of Paul in behalf of the Ephesians, and of all saints, is very expressive on this subject: *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth*

knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. If there be a sentence in the Bible expressive of ultimate bliss, one would think it were this of being *filled with all the fulness of God:* yet this is held up as an object not altogether unattainable in the present life.

But let us look with close attention at the different parts of this wonderful prayer.

Observe, First: The *character* under which God is addressed: *The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.* We sometimes hear prayers among us beginning with a great flow of pompous words, and high-sounding names ascribed to the divine Majesty, without any *relation* to what is prayed for: but the more we examine the prayers recorded in scripture, the more we shall find that all their prefatory ascriptions are appropriate; that is, they bear an intimate relation to the petitions that follow. Thus Jacob prayed when in fear of Esau: *O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac,* &c. Thus also David, *O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.* And thus the souls under the altar *How long, O Lord* HOLY AND TRUE, *dost thou not judge and* AVENGE OUR BLOOD? The same is observable in this prayer of Paul. *The Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ is supposed to be through him the *Father* of all that believe in him, even of the whole *family in heaven and earth;* and to be more ready to impart good things to them than the tenderest father can be to his children. The combining also of the church in heaven and the church on earth, and the representing of them as but *one family,* though in different situations, seem designed to furnish a plea that all the blessedness might not be confined to the former, but that a portion of it might be sent, as it were, from the Father's table to those children who had not yet passed the confines of sin and sorrow.

Secondly: The *rule* by which the Lord is intreated to confer his favours: *According to the riches of his glory.* By the term "riches," we have the idea of fullness, or all-sufficiency; and by the "riches of his glory" that perhaps, of an established character for goodness. Taken together they suggest, that in drawing near to God, whether for ourselves or others, we must utterly renounce all

human worthiness, and plead with him only for his name's sake. This is a plea which has never failed of success.

Thirdly: The *petitions* of which the prayer is composed: *That he would grant you—to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man*, &c. By reviewing these petitions, as quoted above, we shall perceive that the first three are *preparatory* to those which follow. The import of them is, that believers might be girded as it were for an extraordinary effort of mind. He prays for their being possessed of certain things *that they may be able* to comprehend other things. Such is the weakness of our souls for contemplating heavenly subjects, especially "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of redeeming love, that without grace to prepare us for it, it would be utterly beyond our reach.

The first thing prayed for, is, that we may be *strengthened with might by his Spirit in our inner man.* We may possess strong mental powers, and by cultivating them may be able to reason high, and imagine things that shall fill our own minds and those of others with agreeable amazement: yet without that might which is produced by the Holy Spirit, we may be mere babes in true religion, or what is worse, without God in the world. It is being strong in faith, in hope, and in love, that enables the mind to lay hold of eternal life.

To this is added, *that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.* For one to dwell in the heart of another is the same thing as to be the object of his intense affection; and as all that we at present know of Christ, and consequently all the love that we bear to him, has respect to his character as revealed in the gospel, it is "by faith" that he is said to dwell in us. Did not Christ dwell in the hearts of the Ephesians then already? He did: but the object of the Apostle's prayer in this instance was, not that they might be saints, but eminent saints; not that they might merely love Christ in sincerity, but in the highest or most intense degree, And as this prayer is preparatory to what follows, it shows that the more intensely we love him the more capable we are of comprehending his love to us. We may talk of everlasting love, and fancy ourselves to have a deep insight into the doctrines of the gospel; but if his name be not dearer to us than life, it will be little or nothing more

than talk. The deeds of David would appear abundantly more glorious to Jonathan than to those cold-hearted Israelites who had no regard for him. Of all the disciples none were so loving as John, and none have written so largely on the love of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

Once more: He adds, *That ye being rooted and grounded in love.* If Christ's dwelling in our hearts be expressive of love to him, it may seem as though this part of the prayer was a mere repetition: but the emphasis appears to lie upon the terms *rooted* and *grounded.* They are both metaphorical; one referring to a tree or plant, and the other to a building. Now, seeing it was the desire of the Apostle that believers should soar upwards in one respect, he is concerned that they should be prepared for it by descending downward in another. If the tree be not well rooted, or the building well grounded, the higher it rises the greater will be its danger of falling. And what is that in love to Christ, it may be asked, which is analogous to this? It may be its being accompanied in all its operations by *a knowledge* of his true character. One is greatly enamoured of a stranger who has saved his life, and thinks at the time he should be happy to spend his days with him; but as he comes to *know* him, he finds they cannot live together. He regards him as a deliverer, but dislikes him as a man. Another in similar circumstances not only feels grateful for his deliverance, but is attached to his deliverer. The more he knows of him, the better he loves him, and wishes for nothing more than to dwell with him for ever. The regard of the former we should say, is not *rooted*, or *grounded;* but that of the latter is. It is easy to apply this to the love of Christ, and thus to account for the fall of many fair and towering professors, as well as for the growth of true believers.

But what is the *object* of all these petitions? They are only preparatory, as before observed, to what follows. And what is this? *That ye may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.* The love ascribed to Christ is that, no doubt, which induced him to lay down his life for us, and which still operates in the carrying into effect every branch of our salvation. But who

can ascertain its dimensions? Whether we consider the extent of his designs, the duration of its effects, the guilt and misery from which it recovers us, or the glory and happiness to which it raises us, we are lost in the boundless theme. How should it be otherwise, when it *passeth knowledge*, even that of the most exalted creatures?

The perception which we have of this great subject, however, is termed "comprehending," or *taking hold of it*. It is not peculiar to sublime and elevated genius to soar above the skies. The Christian borne on the wings of faith, may adopt the language of Milton, and in a much more real and interesting sense.

"Up led by thee
Into the heaven of heavens I have presum'd,
An earthly guest, and drawn impyreal air."

One more step remains ere we reach the top of this divine climax. In proportion as we comprehend the love of Christ, we are supposed to be *filled with all the fulness of God*. If there be a sentence in be Bible expressive of ultimate bliss, I say again, surely it is this. To be filled with God, with the fulness of God, with all the fulness of God,—what things are these? Yet our being strengthened with might by the Holy Spirit in our inner man, by Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, and by being rooted and grounded in love, we are supposed to be *able*, in measure, to grasp the mighty theme of redeeming love, and so to partake of the divine fulness.

There is a perceivable and glorious fitness in God's imparting his fulness through the knowledge of the love of Christ.—First: It is through his dying love that the fulness of the divine character is *displayed*. Much of God is seen in his other works; but it is here only that we behold his *whole* character. Great as were the manifestations of his glory under former dispensations, they contained only a partial display of him. *No man hath seen God at any time*, said John: but *the only begotton Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath* DECLARED *him*.—Secondly: It is through the dying love of Christ that a way is open for the consistent *communication* of divine blessedness to guilty creatures. God's fulness is a mighty stream; but sin was a mountain which tended to impede its progress, and so to prevent our being filled with it. This

mountain by the dying love of Christ was removed, and cast into the depths of the sea. Hence the way is clear: all spiritual blessings in heavenly places flow freely to us through Christ Jesus. God can pour forth the fulness of his heart towards sinners without the least dishonour attaching to his character as having connived at sin. Thirdly: It is as knowing the love of Christ that we *imbibe* the divine fulness. To be filled with the fulness of God, it is not only necessary that the object be exhibited, and a way opened for its being consistently communicated, but that the soul be emptied of those impediments which obstruct its entrance. There is no room for the fulness of God in the unrenewed mind: it is pre-occupied with other things. All its thoughts, desires and affections are filled with the trash of this world. If it assume the appearance of religion, still it is so bloated with self-sufficiency, that there is no place for a free salvation. But knowing the love of Christ as revealed in the gospel, all these things are accounted loss, and the fulness of God finds free access.

And as it is in the beginning, so it is in the whole of our progress. If we prefer the study of other things to the doctrine of the cross, even of those things which in subserviency to this are lawful, we shall pursue a beaten track. We may feed our natural powers, but our graces will pine away. It is by the study of Christ crucified that our souls will be enriched; for this is the medium through which God delights to communicate of his fulness.

Having considered something of the nature of the heavenly blessedness, our next object of meditation is ITS PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER. By the manner in which some have spoken and written of the heavenly state, it would seem not only as if all would possess an equal measure of blessedness, but that this measure would be completed at once; if not on the soul's having left the body, yet immediately on its re-union with it at the resurrection. But such ideas appear to me to have no foundation in the holy scriptures, There is no doubt, that salvation is altogether of grace, and that every crown will be cast at the feet of Christ: but it does not follow that they shall be in all respects alike. Paul's crown of rejoicing, for instance, will greatly consist in the salvation of those among whom he laboured: but this cannot be the case with every other inhab-

itant of heaven. And with respect to the completion of the bliss, there certainly will be no such imperfection attending it as to be a source of sorrow, but rather of joy, as affording matter for an endless progression of knowledge, and consequently of love and joy and praise. There is no sorrow in the minds of angels in their present state: yet they are described as looking with intenseness and delight into the doctrine of the cross; which clearly indicates a progressiveness in knowledge and happiness. God is perfect, and immutably the same: but it is as he is *revealed*, or *manifested* to us that we enjoy him as our portion. If, therefore, he be gradually manifesting himself through time, and thereby causing the tide of celestial bliss to rise higher and higher, it may be the same to eternity. Nay more, if heavenly bliss consist in knowing the love of Christ, and that love, when all is said and done, *passeth knowledge*, it must be so: there must either come a period when the finite mind shall have perfectly comprehended the infinite, and therefore can have nothing more to learn, or knowledge and happiness must be eternally progressive.

I might here consider the doctrine as proved; but other evidences will appear by examining the *causes* of it, as taught us in the scriptures. That the happiness of saints and angels is now increasing, is abundantly evident from the progressive state of various things from whence it rises. Our Lord assures us that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth: but if so, the gradual progress of his kingdom among men, from it first beginning, must have caused a gradual influx of joy to the heavenly world. The same might be said, no doubt, of other things which are working together for the accomplishment of the divine designs. But I shall select *two* great events as having an influence in this way beyond any thing else with which we are acquainted. These are, THE FIRST AND SECOND APPEARING OF CHRIST. The one will give us some idea of the increase of heavenly blessedness during the separate state, and the other after it.

The person and work of Christ, as we have seen, is the grand medium by which the divine character is manifested. Every stage of his undertaking, therefore, may be expected to exhibit it with increasing lustre, and so to augment the blessedness not only of

saints on earth but of saints and angels in heaven. The *appearing* of Christ, whether to save or to judge the world, is an event which the scriptures seem to have marked with emphasis, and God to have honoured by a peculiar manifestation of his glory. Such is the idea suggested by the following passages: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but it is now made manifest by the* APPEARING *of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.—Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious* APPEARING *of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* From the former of these passages we see that the first appearing of our Saviour was the time marked out of God for pouring forth the fullness of his heart, or for manifesting what had been hid in his secret purposes from before the foundation of the world: from the latter we see that his second appearing is not only a time to which Christians may look forward with hope, but that it is itself their hope, "that blessed hope;" as though all other hopes were comprised in it: and in that it is denominated "glorious," it is intimated that the glory of Christ shall in that day be manifested beyond what it has ever been before.

The influence which the first of these events had on the happiness of the church *on earth* surpassed every thing which had gone before it. Not only was the daughter of Zion called to "rejoice greatly" at the coming of her King, but is directed to "get upon the high mountain," as if to proclaim the glad tidings to the ends of the earth. Yea, fields and woods and seas and heaven and earth are called upon to unite in the general joy.* And is it possible that the blessed above should be uninterested on this occasion? If the repentance of a sinner gives them joy, what must they feel on the appearance of Him who came to save a world?

The ministry of angels, and the appearance of other celestial inhabitants during our Lord's residence on earth, afford some idea of the lively interest which they felt in his undertaking.

* Zech. ix. 9. Isa. xl. 8. Psa. xcvi. 11, 12.

When the heavenly messengers announced his birth to the shepherds, they did not preach an unfelt gospel: by turning the "good tidings which should be to all people" into a song of praise, they manifested how much their own hearts were in the subject. In their *ministering* to him after his temptations in the wilderness we see a cordiality resembling that of Melchizedek to Abraham, when he brought forth bread and wine, and blessed him. It was not for them to appear at the scene of conflict, lest the glory of the victory should seem to be diminished: but they may congratulate him on his return; and furnish him with those things which he refused to obtain by miracle at the instance of the tempter —The appearance of Moses and Elias on the the mount of transfiguration, and their speaking of his *decease* which he should accomplish at Jerusalem, strongly evinces the deep interest which they took in it, and affords a specimen of that which occupied the attention of the heavenly inhabitants.

During our Saviour's sufferings, as under his temptations, it seems to have been ordered that the hosts of heaven, as well as his friends on earth, should in a manner forsake him: not as being uninterested in the event, (for legions of them were ready, if God had given commandment, to have rescued him, or avenged his wrongs;) but that he might grapple as it were single-handed with the powers of darkness, and that to him might be given the whole glory of the victory. Except a single angel who appeared to strengthen him prior to the conflict, all seem to have stood aloof, and with awful silence witnessed its result. But when, rising from the dead, he began his return from the field of battle, they again met him, as Melchizedek met Abraham, with their blessings and congratulations. The resurrection of our Lord was at too early an hour for the most zealous of his disciples to be present; but the heavenly watchers were there; and on his leaving the tomb, were stationed to give information to them that would be seeking him. The question which they put to Mary, *Woman, why weepest thou?* would seem to intimate, that, if she had known all, she would not have wept, unless it were for joy! As from that day Satan had begun to fall before him, a mighty influx of joy must needs have been diffused through all the heavenly regions.

If we follow our Redeemer in his ascension and session at the right hand of God, where he is constituted Lord of all, angels, principalities, and powers being made subject to him, and where he sits till his enemies are made his footstool, we shall observe the tide of celestial blesseaness rise higher still. The return of a great and beloved prince, who should, by only hazarding his life, have saved his country, would fill a nation with ecstacy. Their conversation in every company would turn upon him, and all their thoughts and joys concentrate in him. See then the King of kings, after having by death abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light; after spoiling the powers of darkness, and ruining all their schemes; see him return in triumph! There was something like triumph when he entered into Jerusalem. All the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" And the multitude answered, It is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth; and the very children sung Hozanna to the Son of David: blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hozanna in the highest! How much greater then must be the triumph of his entry into the heavenly Jernsalem! Would not all the city be "moved" in this case, saying *Who is this?* See thousands of angels attending him, and ten thousand times ten thousand come forth to meet him! The entrance of the ark into the city of David was but a shadow of this, and the responsive strains which were sung on that occasion would on this be much more applicable.

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates,
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Even lift them up ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory!"

To form an adequate idea of the mighty influx of joy which this event would produce in heaven is impossible: a few particulars of

it however are intimated in the scriptures. The angels of God previously to the appearing of Christ would learn the divine character principally from the works of creation and providence. When he laid the foundations of the earth, they sang together; and when in the government of the world which he had made, he manifested his wisdom, power, justice, and goodness, they cried one to another, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.* But when the doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ was revealed, they are represented as fixing upon this as their chosen theme—*Which things the angels desire to look into.*

What an idea does this last quoted passage convey of the intense desire and delight of those holy intelligences while exploring the mysteries of redeeming grace! Stooping down, like the cherubim towards the ark and the mercy-seat, their minds are fixed upon the delightful theme. Yet such was its depth that they did not pretend to fathom it, but merely to *look*, or rather *desire to look into it.* The gospel was to them a new mine of celestial riches, a well-spring of life and blessedness.

Much to the same purpose are the words of Paul to the Ephesians. Speaking of the gospel which was given him to communicate to the Gentiles, he calls it *the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that* NOW *unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God.* By whatever mediums God had heretofore made known his manifold wisdom, it is through the redemption of the church that it must "now" be viewed, even by the highest orders of intelligences. And thus it was designed to be from the beginning: all things were ordered in the secret purpose of God, and the fit time of every event determined, "to the intent" that the tide of mercy might rise and overflow with the rising glory of his Son, and that the spoils of his warfare on behalf of men should not only furnish them with an everlasting feast, but a surplus as it were to be distributed among the friendly angels. The foundation of this well ordered frame was laid in creation itself: for God "created all things *by Jesus Christ;*" that is, not merely as a co-

worker with him, but as the end to which every thing was made to fit, or become subservient: *All things were created* BY *him, and* FOR *him.*

We seem to ourselves to be the only parties, under God, who are concerned for the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world: but it is not so. The answer of the angel to John, who by mistake was going to worship him, is worthy of our notice: *See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus.* This language conveys an idea not only of the lively interest which those holy beings take in the promotion of Christ's kingdom on earth, but of their union and co-operation with us in every thing pertaining to it. We know not in what manner this is effected; but so it is; and as their perception both of the worth and the loss of God's favour is exceedingly more vivid and enlarged than ours, such in their view must be the importance of saving a soul from death. By how much also their love to God, and disinterested benevolence to men, exceeds the languid affections of sinful creatures, by so much more lively must be the interest which they feel in the progress of this work. The joy ascribed to them on the repentance of a sinner is that which might be expected: how much higher must it rise then, when the strong holds of Satan give way in a town, a city, or a country, where sinners have heretofore for time immemorial been led captive by him at his will? While the poor servants of Christ are labouring under a thousand discouragements, and sighing under their own unfruitfulness, they, if they were permitted to speak, would say to each of them, as to Mary, *Why weepest thou?*

It cannot be supposed surely that what has been observed of angels is confined to them, and that the ascension of Christ added nothing to the blessedness of the redeemed themselves. It might be presumed that they who are his bone and his flesh would not be the last either in bringing back the king, or in enjoying his triumphs. But we need not rest this conclusion on mere presumptive evidence. Though the visions of John, in respect of *design*, were mostly prophetic of events to be accomplished on earth; yet much of the *scenery* is taken from the work of heaven, and affords some very interesting ideas of that blessed state. Surely

the *new song* of the living creatures and the elders, who were *round about the throne*, may be considered in this light: and they are represented as not only joining with angels in ascribing worthiness to the Lamb, but as dwelling upon one subject peculiar to themselves: *Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*

It is also observable, that these living creatures and elders who were redeemed from among men, are described as rejoicing over the fall of Babylon, and in the prospect of the marriage of the Lamb; which seems to be only a prophetic mode of describing the overthrow of Popery, and the general prevalence of true religion.* But if so, the church above must be interested in all that is going on in the church below; and must derive a large portion of its enjoyments from the progress of that cause in defence of which millions of its members have shed their blood. The exaltation of Christ, as King of Zion, adds, therefore, to the happiness of both heaven and earth.

In what sense could Christ be said to *prepare a place* for his followers, if his presence did not greatly tend to augment the blessedness of that world whither he went, and render it a sweet resort to them when they should have passed their days of tribulation? If heavenly bliss consist much in social enjoyment, the arrival of *any* interesting character must be somewhat of an acquisition. If our present conceptions, however, be any rule of judging, the being introduced to certain dear friends who have gone before us, will be a source of pleasure inexpressible. In this point of view every one who goes before contributes in some degree to prepare a place for those that follow after; and as things continually move on in the same direction, the sum total of heavenly enjoyment must be continually accumulating. But if such be the influence arising from the accession of creatures, what must that have been which followed His entrance who is life itself! His presence would render those blest abodes ten thousand times more blessed! Hence the grand motive to heavenly-mindedness in the New Testament is drawn from the consideration of Christ's being in heaven. *If*, said Paul, *ye be risen* WITH CHRIST, *seek*

* Rev. xix.

those things which are above, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH *on the right hand of God.* And what the Apostle recommended to others was exemplified in himself; for he had *a desire to depart, and to* BE WITH CHRIST *which is far better.* But to *be with Christ* is not to be shut up with him in such a manner as to be unacquainted with what is going on in behalf of his kingdom in this world. On the contrary, we shall there occupy a situation suited to a more enlarged view of it. Solomon represents every event as having its proper season, and all the works of God as forming a beautiful whole; but intimates that man in the present life is *too near the object* to be able to perceive it in all its parts. He is too much in the world, and the world in him, to judge of things pertaining to it on a large scale. *I have seen the travail*, saith he, *which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in its time: also he hath* SET THE WORLD IN THEIR HEART, *so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.* But to be with Christ is to be at the source of influence and the centre of intelligence. It is to be in company with him that sitteth at the helm, knowing and directing all things, and to feel a common interest with him in all that is carrying on.

Such are a few of the ideas given us of the effects of Christ's *first* appearing: but the New Testament ascribes full as much if not more to his appearing a *second* time without sin unto salvation. God seems to have determined to honour the *appearing* of his Son by rendering it the signal for pouring forth a flood of blessedness on the created system. The glory which accompanied his first appearing eclipsed every thing which had gone before it. The dispensation which it introduced is the jubilee of the church; in which millions who sat in heathen darkness have been liberated and brought forth to the light of life. But the glory which shall be revealed on his second appearing will be greater still; and the increase of celestial happiness will transcend every thing which eye hath seen or ear heard, or which it hath entered into the heart of man to conceive. Believers have received abundance of grace already, and shall receive abundance more on their arrival at their Father's house: but both are unequal to *the grace that shall be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

It is worthy of notice, that the glory of that day is set forth in such language as in a manner to eclipse every thing that may be enjoyed in a separate state before it ; and on some occasions it is actually passed over as though it had no existence. Thus when Paul would comfort the Thessalonians for the loss of their Christian friends, he says nothing of their being immediately present with the Lord ; but of their being raised from the dead, and caught up to meet the Lord on his second appearing.

Among the many passages of scripture which hold up this important truth, are the following :—*I shall behold his face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.—Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.—And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivered us from the wrath to come.—Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day ; and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.—Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.—Surely I come quickly. Amen ; even so come Lord Jesus.*

The most plausible arguments that are alleged against the doctrine of a separate state have been drawn from these and such-like passages : and though there be no ground for such a conclusion, yet we are hereby taught to expect that the glory which shall at that time be revealed will greatly transcend every thing that has gone before it. The streams of grace have flowed, and overflowed in all their meandering directions : but here they meet, and fall into the ocean of glory.

The following particulars may in some measure serve to account for the strong language of the New Testament upon this subject.

First : *Salvation will be then completed.*—It hath pleased God to accomplish this great work by degrees. We are saved from the *curse* of sin, by our Redeemer's having been made a curse for us ; from the *dominion* of it, by the renewing of his Spirit ; from the

being of it, at death; but the *effects* of it remain till the resurrection. This last act of deliverance is of such importance as to be the assigned object of our Saviour's second appearance. *He shall come a second time without sin* UNTO SALVATION. Christ's engagements in behalf of those whom the Father hath given him extend not only to the saving of their souls from wrath, but of their bodies from the pit of corruption, and in this have their issue. *This is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.* This deliverance is called *The adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*; and is represented as that for which believers, even those who had the first fruits of the Spirit, groaned within themselves. Every part of the work of salvation is great, and accompanied with joy: but this, being the last, will on this account, in some respects, be the greatest. The husbandman rejoices when his seed is sown, and at every stage of its growth; but the joy of harvest, when he reaps the fruit of his labours, crowns the whole. What the jubilee was to them that were in bondage, that the resurrection will be to the righteous dead. The one was accompanied with general joy, with a public proclamation, with the blowing of the trumpet, and with the liberty of the captives; and so will the other. *The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.*

That this should augment the happiness of heaven is easily conceived. The reunion of soul and body will both furnish new matter for joy, and enlarge our capacity for receiving it. If Christ watches over our dust as a part of his charge, we ourselves cannot be supposed to be indifferent towards it. We know that in contemplating the grave as our long and lonesome habitation, or as that of our friends, we have felt much. The plaintive language of Job has here often been adopted: *Man lieth down, and riseth not; till the heavens be no more they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep!* But by how much we have sown in tears, by so much we shall reap in joy. To hail the happy day after so long an imprisonment; to find our vile bodies changed, and fashioned

like unto Christ's glorious body ; to feel ourselves no more subject to corruption, dishonour, and weakness ; but possessed of incorruption, honour, and immortal vigour, fully adapted to the state to which we shall be introduced, must needs be a source of joy unspeakable. Hence the language of the prophet, which, though it foretels a glorious revival of the church, yet alludes to the joy of the resurrection : *Thy dead shall live* ; *my deceased, they shall arise : awake and sing ye that dwell in dust : for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.**

Secondly : *The opposition which, from the entrance of sin into the creation, has been carrying on against God shall now come to an end, and all its mischievous effects be brought to a glorious issue.* —For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil ; and which purpose will now be fully accomplished. Death is represented as the *last* enemy, which being destroyed in the resurrection, it is supposed that every other enemy shall have fallen before it. Here then will be the triumphant conclusion of the war between Michael and the Dragon, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The appearing of Christ, to raise the dead and judge the world, marks the season or *time of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.* From hence the rebellion raised in the dominions of God shall be crushed ; pardon conferred on some, punishment inflicted on others, and law, peace, and order restored to their ancient channels. Now, as sin, whether in ourselves or others, has been the source of all our unhappiness, to see it in this manner finished, and the cause of Satan utterly ruined, cannot but produce an influx of joy inexpressible.

Thirdly : *The creatures of God will then be delivered from the bondage of corruption, or the yoke of being subservient to his enemies.*†—To magnify *the glory that shall be revealed in us* at the resurrection, the apostles represent it as an object interesting to creation in general, and for which it groaneth and travaileth as it

* Isaiah xxvi. 19. Lowth's Translation. † Rom. viii. 18—23.

were, in pain, longing for our deliverance as the signal of its own. As when a province riseth up against legitimate authority, the greater part, if not the whole of its resources are drawn in, and made to subserve the interest of the rebels against the rightful sovereign ; so when man apostatized from God, all the creatures, whether animate or inanimate, by which the laws of nature were subservient to his happiness, were drawn, as it were. into the confederacy. Sun, moon, stars, clouds, air, earth, sea, birds, beasts, fishes, and all other creatures which contributed to man's happiness, are through his revolt, in some way or other, made to subserve the cause of rebellion. To this "vanity" they are subjected : "not willingly" indeed ; (for every creature, in its proper station, naturally inclines to serve and honour its Creator, and whenever it does otherwise it is against nature) *but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.* In other words, the great supreme, having first established the laws of nature, did not judge it proper to overturn them on account of their abuse ; but to permit the creatures to go on serving the cause of rebellion, till in his own due time he should deliver them from their servitude by other means. Yet to show their original bent, and how much their present subjection is against the grain, they frequently rise up, as if to revenge their Creator's cause, against their abusers. The sun smites them by day, and the moon by night ; the waters drown them ; the air, full of pestilential vapours, infects their vitals , the earth trembles under them and disgorges floods of liquid fire to consume them ; and the animals revolt against them, and even seize them for their portion. In a word, nature, by a bold figure of speech, is personified, and described as labouring under the pangs of child-birth, longing to be delivered of its cumbrous load.

And, as the "redemption, or resurrection of our body," will mark the period when this disorder shall come to an end, it is considered as the birth-day of a new creation. Hence the interests of the sons of God are described as including those of creation in general. The latter are, as it were, bound up in the former: the glorious liberty of the one being a glorious liberty to the other, each longs for the same event : *The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*

Now, as the new heavens and the new earth will henceforth be the abode of righteousness, and no more subject to the vanity of subserving the cause of sin, this must needs contribute to augment the blessedness of the blessed: for, as it would grieve a loyal heart to see the resources of his country turned against their rightful sovereign; so it must rejoice him to see the rebellion crushed and every thing appropriated to his honour, and the peace, order, and happiness of society. Such are the sentiments expressed in the 148th Psalm, in which every creature in heaven above, and in the earth beneath, according to its capacity, is called upon to join in praising God.

Fourthly: *The glory of Christ as a Saviour will be manifested beyond any thing which has appeared before.*—Christ is glorified whenever a sinner is brought to believe in him, and more so when multitudes flock to his standard; but all this is little when compared to the general assembly of the saved, every one of which furnishes an example of the efficacy of his death. The great physician appears with his recovered millions, and in the presence of an assembled universe, presents them to the Father. In that day Christ will no doubt be honoured by his people: but that which is principally held up to us is, his being honoured by others for what is seen in them. He shall come *to be glorified* IN *his saints, and admired* IN *all them that believe.*

Now, as every manifestation of Christ's glory has been productive of an influx of blessedness to his people, and is that indeed in which it consists, this being the greatest of all his manifestations, it may well be supposed to be accompanied with the greatest augmentation of blessedness which has ever been experienced.

Fifthly: *The mystery of God will be finished: or his great designs concerning the world and the church will be accomplished.*—It has been already noticed, that one reason why man labours in vain to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end is, *his nearness to the object;* or his being in the world, and the world, as it were, in him. Another is, that these parts though designed to form a whole resemble at present the detached wheels of a machine, before they are put together. God, who sees the end from the beginning views them as complete: But this is too much for crea-

tures, even the most exalted. The heavenly inhabitants themselves can know things only as they are manifested. Whatever therefore turns up in providence which casts a light on God's designs, is to them an object of delightful attention, and serves of course to augment their blessedness. But if the successively putting together of every part of this divine system has gradually heightened their enjoyments, what must be the effect of the whole being completed? Innumerable events, of which we in this world were ready to think hardly, and they in the other were unable to perceive the use, will now appear wise, merciful, and glorious.

We have been used to speak of creation, providence, and redemption, as if they were distinct systems: but it may then appear that they were in reality one great system; and that the two former have all along subserved the latter. *All things were created* BY *him, and* FOR *him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

But it may be said, One great end of Christ's second coming will be to *judge the world*, and that it is difficult to conceive how this can increase the happiness of the righteous; unless they be so swallowed up in selfish feelings as to care only for themselves. I answer, The righteous will not be swallowed up in selfish feelings, and yet their happiness will be abundantly increased. The design of the last judgment is not merely to *decide* the future state of men, but to *manifest* the holiness, justice, and goodness of the divine proceedings. In this world God requires us to confide in his equity, and does not give an account of any of his operations; but in that day every intelligent creature shall perceive, not only *what* he does, but *why* he does it. Such a display of things to the wicked must, I acknowledge, be a source of unspeakable misery, as it will deprive them of the small consolation of even thinking well of themselves at the expense of their Creator's character: but that which *silences* them will *satisfy* the righteous, and fill them with sentiments of the highest admiration and esteem. Their present feelings will not be so extinguished as to render them hard-hearted towards any creature. They will rather be overcome by the consideration of the righteousness and fitness of the divine proceedings. If they be swallowed up, it will not be in selfishness.

but in the love of God, to whose will all inferior affections, ought to be and will be subordinate. There is a satisfaction felt by every friend of justice in the conviction and execution of a murderer. Humanity in this case is not extinguished but enlarged: it is individual compassion overcome by regard to the general good. Thus, in whatever light we consider the coming of our Lord, it is a "blessed hope," and a "glorious appearing," to all that love it.

The happiness of Jacob in reviewing the issue of that mysterious train of events which brought him and his family down to Egypt, must have overbalanced, not only the sorrows which he felt during the suspense, but the joy of his whole life: much more will the happiness of saints, on reviewing the issue of all the dispensations of God, overbalance, not only their former afflictions, but all their preceding joys.

Great, however, as their happiness will be at the appearing of Jesus Christ, the language used in reference to that period, shows it to be but an *introduction* to greater joys: *Then shall the King say to them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father,* INHERIT THE KINGDOM *prepared for you from the foundation of the world*—ENTER YE INTO THE JOY OF YOUR LORD!

The *likeness of Christ* which is attributed to our *seeing him as he is*, seems to be expressive of something more than a freedom from sin. It denotes; not a negative, but a positive blessing; not an *instantaneous*, but a *gradual* assimilation, like that which is insensibly contracted by being in the company of one with whom our hearts unite. We shall, doubtless, from our first introduction into his presence, on leaving this mortal body, be so far like him as to have no remains of contrariety to him: but a positive like-mindedness with him may, nevertheless, be capable of perpetual increase, as his mind shall be more and more discovered by us. The spirits of the just made perfect are happy, as being free from every degree of misery; but not so filled with positive enjoyment as to be incapable of receiving more: and thus it may be with respect to positive holiness. What is holiness but that in which the whole law is summed up, LOVE? But love is capable of becoming more rooted and grounded, as well as more intense, as the worth

of its object becomes more known and appreciated. And as every degree of attainment capacitates the mind for greater attainments, and the object to be known *passeth knowledge*, there is reason to believe that the things which God hath prepared for them that love him, include nothing less than an eternal accumulation of blessedness.

ANTINOMIANISM

CONTRASTED WITH THE RELIGION TAUGHT AND EXEMPLIFIED IN

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

INTRODUCTION.

When we consider the awful strides which irreligion has lately made in the Christian world, it is almost enough to induce us to think favourably of any thing that bears the name of Christ; of any thing, however, which professes to embrace the leading principles of the gospel; but thus it must not be. Irreligion is not so dangerrous as false religion; the one is an enemy at a distance, the other at home. The more we are threatened by the former, therefore, the more necessary it is that we detect the latter. The friends of Christ, though they be but few, had better be by themselves. A little band, girt with truth, and strengthened by the Lord of hosts, will do more execution than a heterogeneous mixture of friends and enemies.

It is one of the arts of the wily serpent, when he cannot prevent the introduction of the gospel into a place, to get it corrupted; by which means it is not only deprived of its wonted efficacy, but converted into an engine of destruction. In the early ages of the church, men rose up who advanced depreciating notions of the person, work, and grace of the Redeemer. These, however, were repelled, and a stigma fixed upon them by the labours of the

faithful; and though they have had their advocates in all succeeding ages, yet men have not been wanting who have exposed thei fallacy; so much so, that the serious part of professing Christians have in a good measure united against them. But of late we have been taken as it were by surprise; while our best writers and preachers have been directing their whole force against Socinian, Arian, or Arminian heterodoxy, we are insensibly overrun by a system of false religion, which has arisen and grown up among us under the names and forms of orthodoxy.

Several circumstances have concurred to render this system but little noticed. One is, its having been embraced, not so much by the learned, as by the illiterate part of professing Christians. Some of its principles, it is true, are common to every unrenewed mind; but considered as a system, it is especially calculated for the vulgar meridian. On this account it has been treated as beneath the notice of the ablest writers. There is also something so low, foul, and scurrilous in the generality of the advocates of this system, that few have cared to encounter them, lest they should bring upon themselves a torrent of abuse. But though it is far from agreeable to have to do with such adversaries, yet it may be dangerous to treat their opinions with contempt. The Roman empire was overturned by a horde of barbarians. An apostle did not think it beneath him to expose the principles of men who *crept in unawares, and turned the grace of God into lasciviousness.*

The distinguishing *feature* of this species of religion is SELFISHNESS. Such is the doctrine, and such the spirit which it inspires. The love of God *as God*, or an affection to the Divine character as holy, is not in it. Love as exemplified in the scriptures, though it can never be willing to be lost, (for that were contrary to its nature which ever tends to a union with its object,) yet bears an invariable regard to the holy *name* or character of God. *How excellent is thy* NAME *in all the earth!*—*O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his* NAME *together.*—*Let them that love thy* NAME *say continually, The Lord be magnified,*—*Blessed be his glorious* NAME *for ever and ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory Amen and amen.* But love, as exemplified in the patrons of this system, is mere favouritism. God having, as they conceive, made them his favourites, he be

comes on that account, and that only, a favourite with them. Nor does it appear to have any thing to do with good-will to men *as men*. The religion of the apostles was full of benevolence. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, they *persuaded* men, and even *besought* them to be reconciled to God. They had no hope of sinners complying with these persuasions of their own accord, any more than the prophet had in his address to the *dry bones* of the house of Israel: nor of one more being saved than they who were called according to the divine purpose: but they considered election as the rule of God's conduct—not theirs. They wrote and preached Christ to sinners as freely as if no such doctrine had existed. *These things are written*, said they, *that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing ye might have life through his name.* Jesus wept over the most wicked city in the world; and Paul, after all that he had said of the doctrine of election in the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, protested that *his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel was that they might be saved.* He did not pray for them *as reprobates*, but as fellow sinners, and whose salvation, while they were in the land of the living, was to him an object of hope.—In his treatment of the most decided enemies of the truth, though he sometimes rebuked them sharply, and used an authority which was committed to him as an extraordinary character; yet there is no malignant bitterness, or low abuse, in his language. But the religion of which I speak is, in all these respects, the very opposite. It beseeches not the unconverted to be reconciled to God, because it is God only who can turn their hearts. It refuses to pray for their salvation, as not knowing whether it would not be praying for the salvation of the non-elect. It has no tears to shed over a perishing world; but consigns men to perdition with unfeeling calmness, and often with glee. And as to its adversaries, it preserves no measures of decency with them: personal invective, low scurrillity, and foul abuse, are the weapons of its warfare. Tell any of its advocates of their unchristian spirit towards all who are not of themselves, and you may expect to be answered in some such terms as these—'I wish they were in hell: every one should be in his own place, and the sooner the better!'

Nor is it less a stranger to the love of Christians *as Christians*. The religion of the New Testament makes much of this .It is that by which men were known to have passed from death to life ; for the love of him that begat and of those who were begotten of him, were inseparable. But the love which this species of religion inspires is mere party-attachment, the regard of publicans and heathens, any of whom could *love those that loved them*. If any man oppose their opinions, whatever be his character for sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, he is without hesitation pronounced graceless, a stranger to the new-birth, and an enemy of Christ. Even an agreement in principles, among the patrons of this religion, provided there be any competition in their worldly interests, produces not union, but rivalship ; and every low method is practised to supplant each other in the esteem of the people. In various other systems, though you have to dig through whole strata of error and superstition, yet you will occasionally discover a vein of serious and humble piety : but here all is naught. (I speak of the system as carried to perfection, and which in the present day it is to be hoped it is.) Here nothing is to be met with that resembles love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, or temperance ; on the contrary, the fruits of this spirit are selfishness, pride, spleen, and bitterness, which, like the bowels of Vesuvius, are ever collecting, or issuing in streams of death.

The *origin* of this species of religion in individuals, will commonly, I fear, be found in a radical defect in their supposed conversion. True scriptural conversion consists in *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*. But in many of these conversions, there is no appearance of one or the other. With regard to repentance, the system goes in a great measure to preclude it. The manner in which it represents and dwells upon the fall of Adam, so as nearly to remove all accountableness from his posterity, together with its denial, in effect, of the divine authority over the heart, leaves no room for repentance, unless it be for a few gross immoralities. The sins of not loving God and neglecting his great salvation, are entirely kept out of sight. Hence, though you may sometimes see in such conversions great terror of mind, and great joy succeeding to it ; yet you will

rarely perceive in the party, from first to last, any thing like ingenuous grief for having dishonoured God.

As repentance toward God has little if any place in such conversions, the same may be said of faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The true believer, in his first looking to the Saviour for life, stands upon no higher ground than that of a sinner ready to perish. Whatever evidence he may have *afterwards* of his being one of God's chosen people, he can have none at that time ; nor is it in this character that he applies for mercy. The gospel is that which first comforts him, or Christ's having come into the world to save the chief of sinners. But the conversions in question commonly originate in some supposed revelation to the party, that he is of the number of God's elect, that Christ had died for him, and that of course he shall be for ever happy. Considering this as coming from God, he *believes it*, and from thence reckons himself possessed of the faith of God's elect. If afterwards he be troubled by the dictates of conscience, with suspicions of self-deception, he calls these *temptations*, or the workings of *unbelief*, and supposes that the enemy of souls wants to rob him of his enjoyments. Neither his faith, nor his unbelief, has any respect to revealed truth : his whole concern is about his own safety.*

*It is of great importance to notice the distinction between three essentially different questions, which have too often been confounded. (1.) What is it that *warrants* an application to Christ for salvation ? (2.) What is it that *inclines* a sinner to apply to Christ for salvation ? (3.) What *evinces* that a man has come to Christ for salvation ? To the first I should reply, No knowledge of God's secret purposes, no consciousness of internal qualifications ; nothing but the indefinite call of the gospel, in which sinners are described merely by their wants and their wretchedness, is needed to *warrant* a sinner's application to Christ. To the second, I should answer, The secret, effectual influence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to *incline* a sinner to renounce both sin and self-righteousness, and to acquiesce cordially in the way of salvation by Christ ; fully subscribing to its humbling import, and cordially coinciding with its holy tendency. This, however, is only known by its effects, and is no part of his warrant to make application, though it is the cause of his willingness to apply. To the third question an answer must be given by comparing the *word* and the *work* of God together. The latter is abundantly illustrated in the former. The first Epistle of John seems especially intended for this

It is of infinite importance that we be right in our first outset, and that we take up our rest in nothing short of Christ. When a sinner is convinced of his dangerous condition, fears and terrors will commonly possess him. If, under these impressions, he be led to relinquish all other confidences, and to fly for refuge to the hope set before him, all is well. But if, having left off a few of his immoralities, and conformed to the outward exercises of religion, without betaking himself wholly to Christ, he comforts himself that now he is, at least, in a fair way to eternal life, he is building on the sand, and may live and die a mere self-righteous Pharisee.

Or, should he be deprived of his rest; should his fabric be demolished by the blasts of new temptations, and his mind become rather appalled with fear than elated with self-confidence; if by this he be brought to give up his self-righteous hope and come to Jesus as a sinner ready to perish, still it is well. *Such things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit.* But this is not always the issue. Longing for ease to his troubled spirit, he is in the most imminent danger of taking up his rest in any thing that will afford him a present relief: and if in such a state of mind he receive an impression that God has forgiven and accepted him, or read a book or hear a sermon favourable

purpose, to point out the most substantial evidences that we are passed from death unto life. If a man is inquiring, 'May I go to Christ for salvation? Will he receive me if I do?' I would never ask, What will you take with you to recommend you to his mercy? I would rather warn him, If you pretend to take any such thing, you will be sent empty away. But if a man says, 'I have been with Christ, I am interested in him;' I should then ask, And what have you received from him? Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. They who behold his glory are changed into his image. May I not say, All must go to him empty-handed, none come from him without a blessed supply? And wherever his blood has pacified the conscience, it also purifies the heart, and will influence the life. If you have only obtained a *quiet* conscience, and not a *tender* conscience; beware, lest you be found to have been with an impostor, and not with the true Physician of souls; lest your conscience should be not *healed*, but only *benumbed*: and lest, instead of a salutary vivifying medicine, you should have drunk a fatal opiate, which will cause you to sleep the sleep of death. R.

to such a mode of obtaining comfort, he will very probably imbibe it, and become inebriated with the delicious draught. And now he thinks he has discovered the light of life, and feels to have lost his burden. Being treated also as one of the dear children of God by others of the same mind, he is attached to his flatterers, and despises those as graceless who would wish to undeceive him!

Let us pause a minute, and reflect upon this deplorable case. There is no situation, perhaps, more perilous than that of an awakened sinner prior to his having closed with Christ. He is walking as upon enchanted ground, and is in the utmost danger of falling asleep in one or other of its harbours. Nor is there any case in which it is of greater importance to administer right counsel. To go about to comfort such persons on the ground of their present distress, telling them, as some do, that 'the Lord first wounds and then heals, and that their feeling the former is a sign that in due time they will experience the latter,' is to be aiding and abetting them in what may prove their eternal ruin. The mischief in these instances arises from a false notion of the case of the awakened sinner; as though he were really willing and even anxiously desirous of being saved in God's way, if it would but please God to consent that he might, and to signify that consent by revealing it to him. So he thinks of himself, and so his advisers think of him. But the truth is, he is not straitened in God, but in his own bowels. The fountain is open; She Spirit saith Come, and the bride saith come, and whosoever will may come, and take of the water of life freely. God's word directs him to the good way and counsels him to walk in it, promising that in so doing he shall find rest to his soul. Nothing hinders his coming but a secret attachment to his idols, which on coming he is aware must be relinquished. The only comfort that we are warranted to hold up to one in such circumstances, is, that of Jesus Christ having come into the world to save sinners, and of his being able and willing to save all them that come unto God by him. If this afford no consolation, it is at our peril to console him from what he feels in himself, which, till he falls as a sinner ready to perish at the feet of Jesus, is nothing better than the impenitent distress of a Cain, a Saul, or a Judas. It *may* terminate in a better issue, and it may not. Our business

is to point to the gospel refuge ; teaching, intreating, and warning him to flee thither from the wrath to come.

If once a sinner derives comfort from any thing short of Christ, he from thence falls asleep in security ; and it is well if he awakes in this world. He has obtained a kind of "rest for his soul" without "coming to him for it," which must needs therefore be delusive. Stupified by the intoxicating potion, he dreams of being a favourite of heaven, and if any attempt to disturb his repose, it is commonly without effect. *They have smitten me*, (saith he,) *and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not; when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.* Such, or nearly such, is very frequently the beginning of Antinomian religion.

I call those convictions, terrors, and joys, *selfish*, which have no regard to the glory of God, but merely to one's own safety. Every one that knows ony thing of true religion will allow an essential difference between terror on account of the consequences of sin, and an ingenuous grief for having sinned: and the difference is not less between the joy of an imagined safety, (no matter how,) and that which arises from a believing view of the doctrine of the cross. Moreover, I call those impressions *delusive*, in which it is *not any part of revealed truth* which is impressed upon the mind, but a persuasion of our being the favourites of heaven, loved with an everlasting love, and interested in the blessings of the covenant of grace. Nor is it of any account that the impression may have been made by means of some passage of God's word occurring to the mind : the question is, Whether the idea impressed be revealed truth? Satan, we know, has made use of scripture-passages for the purpose of impressing falsehood ;* and where the true meaning of God's word is perverted, and something inferred from it which never was in it, there is reason to think he does the same still. That God's love is everlasting, and that the covenant of grace abounds with blessings, is true ; but it is nowhere revealed of any person in particular that he is interested in them. The promises of God are addressed to men under certain descriptive *characters*, in the manner of the beatitudes in

* Matt. iv.

our Lord's sermon on the mount; nor can we know our interest in them, otherwise than by a *consciousness* of these characters belonging to us. To imagine that it is immediately revealed to us by the Spirit of God, is to suppose that the Spirit's work is not *to take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us;* but to disclose other things which were never before revealed.

If *the truth as it is in Jesus* be impressed upon our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whether it be by reading, or hearing, or thinking; whether by any particular passage of scripture, or by some leading truth contained in it, occurring to the mind, it will operate to produce humility. To be impressed, for instance, with a sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, with the love of God in the gift of his Son, with the love of Christ in dying for the ungodly, with his all-sufficiency and readiness to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, or with the freeness of his grace to the most guilty and unworthy, is the same thing as to be made to feel the influence of that gospel which lays low the pride of man. The *manner* in which these things are impressed upon the mind may be various. I have no doubt but that some conversions which have been very extraordinary, have been nevertheless genuine: for the things impressed are true, and might be proved true from the scriptures; the effects produced also are such as bespeak them to be wrought by the finger of God. But impressions of that which is not truth, or at least not any part of revealed truth, and the tendency of which is to inspire vain confidence, self-admiration, and a bitter contempt of others, cannot proceed from that Spirit whose office is to lead us into the truth, and whose influence, no less than his nature, is *holy*. No sooner is this marvellous light discovered, than the discoverer, encouraged by the example of others, is qualified to decide upon characters; as who are gracious and who are graceless; and this not by the rule laid down in the scriptures, but by his own experience, which he sets up as a standard by which others are to be tried. He is also qualified to distinguish between true and false ministers; this is legal, that is dead, and the other knows little or nothing of the gospel; not because their preaching is unscriptural, or unaccompanied with a holy life; but because it does not yield him comfort, nor accord with his experi-

ence. It is also remarkable, that, in such conversions, *repentance for past sins* has no place. The party, it is true, will talk of his past sins, even such as decency would forbear to mention; but without any signs of shame, or godly sorrow, on account of them. On the contrary, it is not uncommon to hear them narrated and dwelt upon with apparent glee, accompanied with occasional turns of wit and humour, sufficiently evincing that they are far from being remembered with bitterness of soul. Genuine conversion includes genuine repentance, and genuine repentance looks back upon past sins with silent shame and confusion of face. *That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.* But conversions like the above, are noisy and ostentatious. The party having forsaken a few gross immoralities, imagines himself a prodigy of grace, boasting of the wonderful change, and challenging his adversaries to accuse him of evil from the time of his supposed conversion. But he that *lacketh* that *faith* which is followed by *virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity, is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.* When old sins are related with new gust, they are reacted, and lightly as it may be thought of, recommitted. I know of nothing that bears so striking a resemblance to such conversions as the case of the demoniac described by Matthew. Under first convictions and terrors of conscience, *the unclean spirit*, by which the sinner has hitherto been governed, *goeth out of him:* and while *seeking rest* in some other habitation, the house is *swept* of its former filth, and *garnished* with the appearance of religion: still, however, it remains *empty*, or unoccupied by the Spirit of God. Encouraged by so flattering a prospect, the demon *goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.* The first was a state of irreligion, the last of false religion: in the one case he was void of light, in the other, the light which is in him is darkness.

Neither are these delusive impulses confined to the beginning of a religious profession; but generally accompany it in all its sta-

ges ; and in every stage produces a most intolerable degree of spiritual pride. Such persons value themselves as the special favourites of the Almighty, with whom he is on terms of the greatest intimacy, making them, as it were, his confidents, revealing to them the secrets of his heart. Almost all the future events in their own lives, whether prosperous or adverse, with many things in the lives of others, are revealed to them, and not unfrequently their eternal destinies. And these are supposed to be *the secrets of the Lord, which are with them that fear him !*

Another mark of this species of religion, nearly akin to the former, and commonly seen in persons of that description, is *a disposition to interpret all favourable events in providence as proofs of their being the favourites of heaven ; and all unfavourable events towards their adversaries as judgments for their conduct towards them, and, as it were, an avenging of their quarrels.* This is a natural and necessary effect of a selfish religion. Supreme self-love, like every thing else which is supreme, subordinates every thing else to it. If men be governed by this principle, there is nothing in the word or providence of God, in the law, in the gospel, nor even in God himself, which attracts esteem, but as it is subservient to the gratification of their desires. I knew a person of this description who came to the possession of a large estate. He was much elated by it, often talking of providence, and exulting in his success, as an instance of eternal predestination. In a little time, however, there arose another claimant, who, by a legal process, wrested it out of his hands. After this, no more was heard of providence, or predestination. From wishing every thing to be subservient to the gratification of self, it is an easy transition to think it is so ; for opinions are greatly governed by desires. Hence, if an adversary be unsuccessful in business, it is the blast of God upon him ; if afflictions befal him, they are the arrows of the Almighty discharged at him ; or if he die, he is cut off as a monument of Divine displeasure ; and *all because he has offended God, by offending this his peculiar favourite !*

A truly humble Christian will regard the providence of God in all things ; yet, knowing that *one event happeneth to all*, he is far from considering its bounties as any proof of an interest in special

grace. Neither will he set up his present accommodation as a matter of so much consequence, that heaven, and earth, and all which in them is, should be rendered subservient to it. Nor is he disposed to triumph over an adversary when evil befals him; nor to imagine that it is in just judgment for the offences committed against *him* It is said of Lady Rachel Russel, whose lord was beheaded in the latter end of the reign of Charles II. that, "In the free effusions of her heart to her most intimate friends, with the constant moans of grief for the loss of her dear husband, there did not appear, in all her letters, so much as one trace of keen resentment, or reflection upon any person whatever, that had any concern in his death, if rather it may not be called his *murder*. If the Duke of York was so malignant as to instigate his brother, king Charles, to be inexorable to the applications that were made for Lord Russel's life, and even to propose that he should be executed at his own door, the good lady drops no censures upon him; and even after James II. was no more king, but a wanderer in a foreign land, there is nothing like a triumph over him, or an intimation from her ladyship that she thought he was justly punished for his bloody crimes.—Even the inhuman Jefferies himself, who distinguished himself by a flaming speech against Lord Russel, at his trial, is passed over in silence by her. She takes not the least notice of his disgrace, imprisonment, and death in the tower, owing, as it has been thought, to the blows he received while in the hands of an enraged populace."*

This is the spirit possessed by the first character of his age, holy Job; and who stood accused, notwithstanding, by those who judged of characters by the events which befel them, of being a wicked man and a hypocrite. *He rejoiced not at the destruction of him that hateth him—neither did he suffer his mouth to sin by wishing a curse for his soul.*

One would think it did not require any extraordinary discernment to discover that this is true religion, and that it will be approved at that tribunal where a spirit of pride and malignity will be ashamed to show its face.

* Dr. Gibbon's Memoirs of Eminently Pious Women, Vol. I. pp. 313—315.

Far be it from me, to suggest that all who have cherished notions which belong to this system are destitute of true religion. It is not for us to pronounce upon the degree of error which may be permitted to accompany the truth. I have no doubt but that many good men have been deeply tinctured with these principles, though it is not from them that their goodness has proceeded. I believe, however, that this was more the case formerly than at present. Of late years the true character of the system has been more manifest. Its adherents having proceeded to greater lengths than their predecessors, both in theory and practice, upright characters, who for a time, were beguiled by its specious pretences of magnifying grace and abasing human pride, have perceived its real tendency and receded.

What I have to offer will be comprehended in three parts; the first containing a brief view of the system—the second, its influence on some of the principal doctrines of the gospel—and the third, its practical efficacy on the spirit and conduct of its professors.

PART I.

CONTAINING A BRIEF VIEW OF ANTINOMIANISM, WITH ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE LEADING PRINCIPLE FROM WHICH IT IS DENOMINATED.

THE names given to the different systems, or doctrines of religion, are seldom so accurate as to render it safe to rest our opinions upon them. They may be supposed to have been first conferred either by friends or enemies: if by the former, they commonly assume the question at issue; and if by the latter, they are as commonly mere terms of reproach. But allowing them to have been conferred impartially, yet it is next to impossible for a name to express more than some one or two leading doctrines pertaining to a system. Unitarianism, for instance, not only assumes more than its opponents can grant, but admitting its fairness, it expresses scarcely a tenth part of the principles of the people who wish to be denominated by it. It is thus in part with respect to Antinomianism. The name signifies *that which is contrary to the law;* because those who are denominated Antinomians profess to renounce the moral law as a rule of conduct, and maintain that as believers in Christ they are delivered from it. This appellation, so far as it goes, seems to be appropriate; but it is far from expressing all the distinguishing opinions of which the system is composed. It may be found, however, to be that which the corner-stone is to the building. The moral government of God lies at the foundation of all true religion, and an opposition to it must needs be followed by the most serious consequences. If there be no law, there is no transgression; and if no transgression, no need of forgiveness. Or if there be a law, yet if it be unjust or cruel, either with respect to its precepts or penalties, it is so far no sin to

transgress it, and so far we stand in no need of mercy. Or if there be a just law, yet if on any consideration its authority over us be set aside, we are from that time incapable of sinning, and stand in no need of mercy. The sum is, that whatever goes to disown or weaken the authority of the law, goes to overturn the gospel and all true religion.

It has been said, that every unregenerate sinner has the heart of a Pharisee. This is true ; and it is equally true that every unregenerate sinner has the heart of an Antinomian. It is the character expressly given to the carnal mind, that it is *enmity against God ;* and the proof of this is, that it *is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* Nor is it surprising that these two apparently opposite principles should meet in the same mind. There is no more real opposition between them than there is between enmity and pride. Many a slothful servant hates his master and his service, and yet has pride and presumption enough to claim the reward. It is one thing to be attached to the law, and another to be *of the works of the law.* The former is what David and Paul and all the true servants of God have ever been, loving and delighting in it after the inner man : the latter is what the unbelieving Jews were ; who, though they none of them kept the law, yet presumptuously expected eternal life for their supposed conformity to it. The quarrels between Antinomianism and Pharisaism arise, I think, more from misunderstanding than from any real antipathy between them. They will often unite, like Herod and Pontius Pilate, against the truth and true religion.

The spirit of Antinomianism is to fall out with the government of God, to raise objections against it as rigorous and cruel, to find excuses for sin committed against it, and to seize on every thing that affords the shadow of an argument for casting it off: but all this is common to every carnal mind. If our Antinomians could pay a visit to the heathens of Hindoost'han, (and probably the same might be said of heathens in general,) they would find millions on millions of their own way of thinking.* Nor need they go so far from home : among the apostles of modern infidelity the same

* See Periodical Accounts, Vol. I. pp. 227, 228.

thing may be found in substance. The doctrine of Necessity *as embraced by them,** reduces man to a machine, destroys his accountableness, and casts the blame of sin upon his Creator. The body of these systems may be diverse; but the spirit that animates them is the same.

Antinomianism, having annihilated moral obligation, might be expected to lead its votaries to the denial of sin: yet, strange as it may appear, there is scarcely any people who speak of their sins in such exaggerating language, or who make use of such degrading epithets concerning their character as they. But the truth is, they have affixed such ideas to sin as divest it of every thing criminal, blameworthy, or humiliating to themselves. By sin, they do not appear to mean their being or doing what they ought not to be or do; but something which operates in them without their concurrence. In all the conversations that I have had with persons who delight in thus magnifying their sins, I cannot recollect an instance in which they appeared to consider themselves as inexcusable, or indeed ever the worse on account of them. On the contrary, it is common to hear them speak of their sinful nature with the greatest levity, and with a sort of cunning smile in their countenances, profess to be as bad as Satan himself; manifestly with the design of being thought deep Christians, thoroughly acquainted with the plague of their own heart.

There are two principal grounds on which moral government and accountableness are by this system explained away; namely, the *inability of man*, and the *liberty and privileges of the gospel.* The former applies to the unregenerate, who pretend to no religion, and serves to keep them easy in their sins; the latter to those who consider themselves as regenerate, and serves to cherish in them spiritual pride, slothfulness, and presumption.

It is undoubtedly true, that the scriptures represent man by nature as unable to do any good thing; that is, they declare that an evil tree *cannot* bring forth good fruit; that they who are evil *cannot* speak good things; that they whose eyes are full of adultery

* See a View of Religions, by Hannah Adams, Article *Necessarians*, pp. 233—238.

cannot cease from sin; that they who are in the flesh *cannot* please God; finally, that they whose hearts are attached to their idols, or to the mammon of this world, *cannot* serve the Lord.* This doctrine, if properly understood, is of great account in true religion. From hence arises the necessity of our being created anew in Christ Jesus ere we can perform good works; and of our being continually kept from falling by the power of God. He that has the greatest sense of his own weakness and insufficiency to do any thing as he ought, will be most earnest in crying to the strong for strength, and most watchful against the temptations of the world. It is thus that "when we are weak, then are we strong." But if this doctrine be confounded with physical inability, and understood to excuse the sinner in his sins, it is utterly perverted. If the connexion of the above passages were consulted, they would be found to be the language of the most cutting reproach; manifestly proving that the inability of the parties arose from the evil dispositions of their own minds, and therefore had not the least tendency to render them less accountable to God, or more excusable in their sins: yet such, in spite of scripture, conscience, and common sense, is the construction put upon it by Antinomianism.

Let a miniter of Christ warn the ungodly part of his audience of their danger, and exhort them to flee for refuge to the hope set before them; and if they have learned this creed they will reply, 'We can do nothing.† We *desire* to repent and be converted;

* Matt. vii. 18. 12. 24. 2 Peter ii. 14. Rom. viii. 8. Josh. xxiv. 19—23. Matt. vi. 24.

† I well remember an instance of this sort. A young man, who had, indeed too often heard a very injudicious statement of this subject, was asked 'Master ———, do you ever think about your soul? do you ever seek after salvation? do you pray for an interest in Christ?' He readily replied, '*I can do nothing—I am dead.*' Thus the strongest phrase used in scripture to express the total depravity of man, or the full dominion of sin over the carnal heart, was turned into a thorough excuse. Surely to be dead *in sin* is to be *sinfully* dead. And it may justly be added, that to be *dead in sin* is exactly equivalent to being *alive to sin*. If the former phrase would furnish an

but it is God only, you know, that can convert us. All that we can do is to lie in the way, and wait at the pool for the moving of the waters.' Let him visit his hearers upon a bed of affliction, and endeavour to impress them with a sense of their sin, in having lived all their days in a neglect of the great salvation, and of their danger while they continue the enemies of Jesus Christ—if they have learned this system, he will be told that 'they have done all that they *could*, or nearly so; that they wish for nothing more than to repent and believe in Christ; but that they can as easily take wings and fly to heaven as do either.' Thus they flatter themselves that *they are willing*, only that God is not willing to concur with their sincere desires: whereas the truth is, no such desires exist in their minds, but merely a wish to escape eternal misery; and the want of them, together with a strong attachment to their present course, constitute the very inability of which they are the subjects. Here, too, we see how the Antinomian can occasionally unite with the self-righteous Pharisee. The latter will insist upon the goodness of his *heart;* and the former tells you he *wishes*, he *desires*, he *means* well; but he cannot do it of himself, and God it seems will not help him: but what do all these pretended good wishes and desires amount to short of a good heart? The thing is the same, only expressed in somewhat different language.

It is remarkable that we never read of this kind of answers being given to the exhortations in holy writ. Wicked men of old were, in times of trouble, exhorted to *stand in the ways, and see to ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and to walk therein*; and were told that in so doing they should *find rest unto their souls.*

apology for the neglect of the great salvation, so would the latter. For the heart to be so attached to the pleasures of sin, as that none but God can draw it off, or so engrossed by the love of this present evil world, as to leave no room for the Saviour, is the same thing as to be alienated from the life of God, through that inherent ignorance which results from the callousness of the heart. I may add, As well may the wicked, whose tender mercies are cruelty, plead *hard-heartedness* as an excuse for the absence of all benevolence and compassion to man, as sinners plead the hardness of their hearts as an excuse for the want of supreme love to God and his Christ. R.

To this they roundly answered, *We will not walk therein.* Had these people understood the modern Antinomian refinements they might, I think, have come off with somewhat a better grace, by alleging their inability; but it does not appear that they were acquainted with them, and therefore the true cause was assigned without ceremony or disguise. When John the Baptist, Christ, and his apostles, exhorted their hearers to *repent and believe the gospel*, if they had been acquainted with these notions they might have answered, 'We *wish* to do so; but Jesus himself acknowledges that no one *can* come to him except the Father draw him: the fault, therefore, is not in us.' But this method of repelling the truth seems to have been reserved for later ages. I recollect nothing that bears any resemblance to it in the scriptures, unless it be the words of certain ungodly men in the times of Jeremiah, who said, *We are delivered to do all these abominations;* and the objection introduced by Paul, *Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?* These men seem to have been acquainted with that part of the system which finds an excuse in the doctrine of divine decrees; but even they do not appear to have learned to plead innocent on the score of inability. And wherefore? Because they were conscious that it lay in the state of their own minds. When asked, therefore, by our Saviour, *How* CAN *ye being evil speak good things?* so far were they from imagining that he meant to excuse them, that they considered his words as the most pointed reproach.

With respect to *the liberty and privileges of the gospel*, it is a truth full of the richest consolation, that those who believe in Jesus are freed, not only from the ceremonial yoke of the Mosaic dispensation, but from the condemning power of the law considered as moral. It is by faith in Christ that believers live. All their hope is derived from his righteousness which being imputed to them they are accepted of God on account of it. Being "not under the law" as a covenant, "but under grace," sin hath no more dominion over them.—But surely it does not follow that they are no longer under obligation to love God with all their

heart, soul, mind, and strength, or their neighbour as themselves.* The prodigal son, when forgiven and accepted, was not less obliged to conform to the orders of his father's house than before he left it, but rather the more so.

I shall conclude this part by offering proof that though the law is dead to a believer, and a believer to it, as *a term of life*, yet he is under perpetual and indissoluble obligation to conform to it as *a rule of conduct*.

To satisfy a serious and sincere mind on this subject one would think it were sufficient to read the ten commandments in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. Is a believer any more than an unbeliever, allowed to have more God's than one? May he make to himself a graven image and fall down and worship it? Will the Lord hold him guiltless if he take his name in vain? Is he not obliged to keep holy the sabbath day? Is he at liberty to dishonour his parents, or kill his neighbours, or commit adultery, or steal, or bear false witness, or covet any thing belonging to another? Surely the things which are required by all these precepts must approve themselves to every man's conscience, unless it be perverted and seared as with a hot iron.

But in order to set aside the authority of the ten commandments as a rule of duty to the believer, it has been objected that they do not contain the whole of it. If this were granted, yet it would not follow but they are binding as far as they go; but if so, why pretend to be delivered from the law? The new commandment of Christ to love one another, does not include the whole of duty, and yet we are not free from obligation to comply with it. If the ten commandments were admitted to be binding as far as they go, their comprehending the whole of duty would be a question of comparitively small importance; but the manifest design of the objector is, by undermining their perfection to overturn their authority, that having freed himself from this disagreeable yoke he may establish what he calls Christian liberty.

* See Dr. Ryland's Sermon before the Association at Salisbury, entitled *The Dependence of the Whole Law and the Prophets on the two Primary Commandments*, 1798. Also his Sermon before the Association at Lyme, on *The Necessity of the Trumpet's giving a certain Sound.* 1813.

To show the perfection, then, as well as the authority of the ten commandments, let it suffice to have recourse to our Saviour's exposition of them. If that exposition be faithful, they are reducible to two, answering to the tables of stone on which they were written, and consisting in "love to God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to our neighbour as ourselves." But love to God and our neighbour comprehends every act of duty that can possibly be performed. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and of all that God requires of man. It is the principle of all positive obedience: for he that loveth God supremely, willingly obeys him in whatever forms he shall prescribe. The new commandment, of love to the brethren is comprehended in the old commandment: For he that loveth God cannot but love his image wherever it is seen. Hence the former is enforced by the latter."* All the graces of the spirit, as repentance, faith, hope charity, patience, temperance, goodness, &c. are but so many modifications of love. He that loveth God cannot but be grieved for having dishonoured him: cannot but believe his word, and embrace his way of saving sinners through the death of his Son; cannot but build his expectations upon his promises; cannot but love those that love him; cannot but take every thing well at his hand; in short, cannot but deny himself for his sake, and aspire to be of his mind who causeth his sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and upon the unjust. Upon this great principle, therefore as our Lord observed, *hangs all the law and the prophets*, and, indeed, the whole of true religion.

'Yes,' say some, 'we must be ruled by a *principle* of love; but not by the law as requiring it. The love of Christ constrains the believer to be zealous in the performance of good works.' It is true, we shall never love without a principle, nor run in the ways of God's commandments unless constrained to do so by a gracious enlargement of heart. Nor does any thing afford so powerful a motive to it as the dying love of Christ. But to make that the rule which is the moving spring of obedience, is to confound things essentially different. "The way of God's commandments"

* Gal. v. 13—15. Rom. xiii. 8—12.

is the same, whether our hearts be "enlarged to run therein" or not. To confound the rule with the moving cause, or to make a rule of the latter to the exclusion of that which is afforded by the commandment is to reduce our obligations to the standard of our inclinations, or to consider ourselves as bound to yield just so much obedience to God as we do yield, and no more; and this is the same thing as professing to live free from sin. Moreover, to make that the rule of obedience which is the moving cause of it, is the same thing as for a son to say to his father, 'Sir, I will do what you desire me when I feel inclined to do so, but I will not be *commanded.*' Whatever may be argued against the authority of God, I believe there are few if any parents who could put up with such language with respect to their own.

In addition to the above, let the following particulars be duly considered:—

I. If we be not under the moral law as a rule of life, we are not *obliged* to love either God or man, and it is no sin to be destitute of love to both. But such a state of things can never exist. The obligation to love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves, if founded in our relation to him and one another, and cannot possibly be dissolved while God is God and man is man. To suppose the contrary, is to suppose that the king of the universe can abdicate his throne, and leave his subjects at liberty to hate and rebel against him with impunity. If all the fathers of families in the world could dispense with filial affection in their children, and all the princes in the world with loyal attachment in their subjects, it were less unnatural, and infinitely less mischievous, than for God to dispense with the requirement of our loving him supremely, and each other as ourselves.

II. Believers are represented as subject to commit sin, and as actually committing it every day of their lives. The petition for daily forgiveness, in the Lord's prayer, supposes this; and John teaches, that *if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* But all sin implies a law of which it is the breach: *Where no law is, ther is no transgression.* Believers, therefore, must be under some law. And that this is no other than the moral law, is evident from the definition which is given of sin

by the apostle John, that it is *the transgression of* THE LAW. This is the same as saying, that every sin which is committed, whether by believers or unbelievers, is a deviation from that divine rule. The sum is, if believers daily break the law they must of necessity be under it as a rule of duty.

If the law were abrogated, or its authority superseded, so as to be no longer a rule of duty to believers, it could be no medium to *them* by which to come at the knowledge of sin. That by which sin is known must be a living rule. To say otherwise, is as absurd as to judge of the criminality of a prisoner by a statute which had been long since repealed.

III. One great and leading design of our Lord in his sermon on the Mount was to vindicate the precepts of the moral law from the false glosses of the Jewish Rabbies, and to show that in their most spiritual meaning they were binding upon his followers. Coming into the world, as he did, to introduce a new dispensation, he was aware that men might suppose his mission was at variance with Moses and the Prophets. To prevent such conceits, he speaks in the most decided language—*Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* He also goes on to warn his followers against those who should *break the least of the commandments, and teach men so;* and to declare, that *except their righteousness exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.* To say that we need the righteousness of Christ to be imputed to us, is to speak truth, but not the truth of this saying, the manifest design of which is to inculcate a purer morality than that which was taught and practised by the Jewish leaders.

The advocates of the system I oppose, are offended at the very terms *practical preaching* and *practical religion;* yet the sermon on the Mount was full of it. The solemn and impressive similitude with which it closes, is in the same practical strain. He that heareth his sayings and *doeth* them, he buildeth his house upon a rock; and he that heareth but *doeth* them not, buildeth his house upon the sand. It was not our Lord's design, indeed, to hold up

any of our doings as the rock, but as *building our house upon the rock;* and which none do but those whose faith is operative and practical.

Had this sermon been heard by many a modern audience, it would have been condemned as legal, and the preacher pronounced a poor graceless wretch, who knew nothing of the gospel.

IV. Believers are exhorted, in the New Testament, to love one another on the express ground of its being a requirement of the moral law. *Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.* If the "liberty" possessed by the Galatians consisted in a freedom from obligation to obey the precepts of the moral law, it is passing strange that these very precepts should be urged as an authority against their using liberty as an occasion to the flesh. Paul, whatever some of his professed admirers have been, was assuredly a better reasoner than this would make him. The liberty of the gospel, includes an exemption from the precepts of the ceremonial law, and from the curse or condemning power of the moral law; and these were privileges of inestimable value. They were, however, capable of abuse; and to guard against this, the holy *precept* of the law, notwithstanding the removal of its penalty, is held up by the Apostle in all its native and inalienable authority. To the same purpose the Apostle, writing to the believing Romans, inculcates brotherly love and purity from the authority of the moral law. *Owe no man any thing, but love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the*

*works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.** *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.* If any man can read this passage without perceiving that the precepts of the moral law are still binding on believers, he must be proof against evidence; and with such a person it is in vain to reason. If God give him not repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, he must e'en go on, and abide the consequences.

V. Believers are either under the law, (in the sense in which we plead for it,) or *without law*. By the language of the Apostle there can be no medium. There is no other way of exonerating ourselves from the charge of being *without law to God*, but by acknowledging that we are *under the law to Christ*. Such was the acknowledgment of Paul in behalf of the primitive Christians: *To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.* His words plainly intimate a change, indeed, in its administration; but not of the thing itself. Formerly it was administered by Moses, and attended with that terrific aspect which properly pertains to it when addressed to transgressors: now it is administered by Christ, who has placed it at the foundation of his legislative code, and by divesting it of its curse, has rendered it to the believer a friendly guide. But the thing itself is the same, and will remain so when heaven and earth shall have passed away.

VI. Those who have the greatest aversion to the law being a rule of life, yet are very willing that others should make it a rule of their conduct towards them. Whether they are bound to love their neighbours as themselves, or not, if they are treated unkindly or unjustly, even by their brethren, they are as much alive to resentment as any other people. But if they be not obliged to love others, why should others be obliged to love them; and why should they be offended with them for the contrary? And if the

* Even the terms, "Let us," &c. have of late given offence to some hearers, as savouring of legality: yet Paul's writings abound with such language.

second table of the law be mutually binding, on what ground can we plead exemption from the first?

We have often heard it intimated, that the obligation of sinful creatures to love God with all their hearts is very difficult to be understood; yet we can any of us understand, with the greatest ease, the obligations which others are under to us. If a man be a kind and good father, he feels no difficulty in understanding the fitness and reasonableness of his children loving him, and that with the most unfeigned affection; receiving his instructions, following his example, and taking pleasure in obeying his will. Should any one of them be ungrateful or disobedient, and plead that he *could not* love his father, nor take pleasure in obeying him, he would instantly perceive that what was alleged as his excuse, was the very height of disobedience of which he ought to be ashamed. Yet when God is concerned, the same man will tell you, 'We are poor sinners, and cannot love him; and as to your nice distinctions between natural and moral inability, we cannot understand them. If we are unable, we are unable, and it does not signify of what kind the inability is.'

So also when we insist on every person or thing being loved in subordination to the blessed God, and every action done with a view to his glory, it is objected, that the subject is too abstruse and metaphysical for common Christians to understand it. Yet I never knew a Christian or any man but who could pretty well take in the doctrine of *subserviency* as it related to himself. He can easily understand that a servant whom he pays for his time and labour ought to lay them out in promoting *his* interest, and not merely his own; and if such servant, when pursuing his own private interest, should accidentally, or without design, promote that of his master, would his master thank him for it, or think a whit better of him on account of it? No, in all these things man is wise in his generation: it is only where God and religion are concerned that he finds such insuperable difficulties. Every nation, community, or individual, knows how to set itself up as *supreme*, and to wish for all others to be rendered *subservient* to its interests. Man, by his ingenuity, can draw into subordination to himself, the light, the

darkness, the fire, the water, the air, the earth, the animals, and almost every thing else that comes within his reach : but man cannot understand the abstruse doctrine of loving every thing in subordination to his Creator, and doing every thing in subserviency to his glory!

PART II.

THE INFLUENCE OF ANTINOMIANISM IN PERVERTING SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL.

IF the law and the gospel be in harmony, (and which if the author of both be immutable they are,) it may be expected that the same great design pervades them both. Such is the fact. The law requires us to love God supremely, and our neighbour as ourselves. Had this requirement been obeyed, the honour of God and the happiness of creatures had been for ever united. But men by sin *have fallen into a gulf of selfishness.* They neither love God, nor their neighbours for his sake. They are *lovers of their own selves;* and care for neither God or man any farther than as they conceive them to be necessary for their own happiness. But what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the corruption of human nature, God sent his Son to accomplish. God would be glorified in Christ, though men had dishonoured him; and though they had incurred his wrath, and become hateful and hating one another, yet peace and reconciliation should be restored in him. Hence, on his first appearance on earth, the angels, entering into the grand design of his coming, sang, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!*

But if the law and the gospel be in harmony, they that fall out with the one must fall out with the other. A scheme that sets out with rejecting all obligation to the love of God and man cannot be friendly to either, nor to that gospel whose tendency is to promote them. It must be a mere system of *selfishness;* suited not to the condition but to the propensities of fallen creatures.

It might be expected that a system founded on such a principle would go on to a flat denial of most of the doctrines of divine revelation. It is not so, however; the forms of orthodoxy are in

general retained, it is the ideas chiefly that are given up. The same terms may be used by different persons to express very different ideas. The Jews, in our Saviour's time, professed the same creed, perhaps, in the main, as their forefathers. They reckoned themselves, however, to believe in Moses: but holding with Moses to the exclusion of Christ, their faith was so different from that of their forefathers as to become void. *If ye believe Moses*, said our Lord, *ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me.* From the same principle it follows that the faith of those who hold with Christ to the exclusion of Moses, is void; for if they believed one they would believe the other, seeing both are in perfect harmony.

The doctrine of *Election*, as it is taught in the scriptures, is of a humbling and holy tendency. The whole difference between the saved and the lost being ascribed to sovereign grace, the pride of man is abased. Upon every other principle, it is the sinner that maketh himself to differ; and he must, therefore, find whereof of glory. We may allow ourselves to be unable to repent and believe without the *aids* of the Holy Spirit: but while we maintain that these aids are afforded to sinners in common, and that faith, instead of being "the gift of God," is the effect of our having improved the help afforded, while others neglected it, if we think we do not ascribe the very turning point of salvation to our own virtue, we greatly deceive ourselves. But *election*, while it places no bar in the way of any man which would not have been there without it, resolves the salvation of the saved into *mere grace*: *and if of grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace.* Such a view of things tends to humble us in the dust. It is frequently the last point which a sinner yields to God: it is the giving up of every other claim and ground of hope from his own good endeavours, and falling into the arms of sovereign mercy. And having here found rest to his soul, he will not be less but more attentive to the means of salvation than he was before. His endeavours will be more ardent, and directed to a better end. Then he was trying to serve himself, now he will serve the Lord. But if election be viewed in certain *connexions*, it will

cease to be a doctrine according to godliness. If faith and works foreseen be connected with it as effects, the interests of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, are relinquished.

If we take our views of this great subject with simplicity, from the word of God, we shall consider it, like other divine purposes, not as a rule of conduct to us, but to himself. We shall agonize through life, that we may at last enter in at the straight gate, no less than if all was in itself uncertain. Nay, more so: for as Paul's assuring the mariners that there "should be no loss of any man's life," would if believed, inspire them with hope; so our being predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ, furnishes encouragement to be pressing on towards the mark. And as they were told, nevertheless, that except certain means were used, they "could not be saved;" so we can have no evidence of our "election to salvation," but as being the subjects of *sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth.* Thus while the blessing itself is an antidote to despair, the means connected with it are a preservative from presumption. In short, we shall view the doctrine of election in much the same light as we do other divine appointments concerning our lot in the present life. We are given to believe that what we enjoy in this life, is so ordered by the will of God, and so much the effect of providence, that there is no ground whatever of boasting in any creature; yet we do not on this account neglect to plough or sow, or pursue the good or avoid the evil.

A "fleshly mind" may ask, How can these things be? How can divine predestination be made to comport with human agency and accountableness? But a truly humble Christian, finding both in the Bible, will believe both, though he may be unable fully to conceive of their consistency; and will find in the one a motive to depend upon God, and in the other against slothfulness, and a presumptuous neglect of duty.

A Christian minister, also if he take his views simply from the scriptures, will find nothing in this doctrine to hinder the free use of warning, invitations, and persuasions, either to the converted or to the unconverted. Not that he will found his hopes of success on the pliability of the human mind; but on the power and

grace of God, who, while he prophesieth to the dry bones as he is commanded, is known to inspire many with the breath of life. Thus, while the Apostle, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, traces the divine sovereignty in his calling some from among the Jews, and leaving the greater part of them to perish in unbelief; he nevertheless, so long as they were in this world, was deeply concerned for them. Even in his preaching to the Gentiles he had an eye to them, *if by any means he might provoke to emulation them that were his flesh, and might save some of them.* And though he taught believers from among them to ascribe their salvation entirely to electing grace, and spoke of the rest as being blinded; yet he represents that blindness as being their own fault, to which they were judicially given up of God.*

But whatever this doctrine is in itself, yet it may be held in such a manner as to become a source of pride, bitterness, slothfulness, and presumption. Conceive of the love of God as a capricious fondness; suppose that because it had not motive in the goodness of the creature, therefore it was without reason; only so it was, and so it must be; view it not so much a mean of glorifying his character, as an end to which every thing must become subservient: imagine yourself to be an object of this love, a darling of heaven, a favourite of providence, for whom numerous interpositions, next to miracles, are continually occurring, and instead of being humble before God as a poor sinner, your feelings may resemble those of a flattered female, who while she affects to decline the compliments paid her; is in reality so intoxicated witht he idea of her own importance, as to look down with contempt on all her former companions.

Such views of the doctrine will ordinarily excite contemptuous feelings towards all who are not its adherents, considering them as graceless sinners, strangers to the liberty of the gospel. Pharisees, Hagarenes, children of the bond-woman, and the like; towards whom the most malignant bitterness is Christian faithfulness.

* Rom. xi. 7—16.

God's election of the posterity of Abraham was of sovereign favour, and not on account of any excellency in them natural or moral.* In this view it was humbling, and had, no doubt, a good effect on the godly Israelites. But the Jews, in our Savour's time, turned this their national election into another kind of doctrine, full of flattery towards themselves, and of the most intolerable contempt and malignity towards others.

The doctrine of the *Atonement* is, in itself, the life of the gospel system. View it as a glorious expedient devised by Infinite Wisdom for the reparation of the injury done by sin to the divine government, and for the consistent exercise of free mercy to the unworthy, and you are furnished with considerations the most humiliating, and at the same time the most transporting that were ever presented to a creature's mind.

The principles of this divine interposition are set forth in the scriptures in divers forms ; but probably in none so fully as in the *substitutional sacrifices*, which, from the fall to the coming of Christ, formed a conspicuous part of instituted worship. The great truth inculcated by these sacrifices, from age to age, would be, *Without shedding of blood there is no remission.* Some of the leading sentiments which they were calculated to inspire, may be seen in the sacrifice of Job, on behalf of his three friends. *The Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept ; lest I deal with you, after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, like my servant Job.* This reproof and direction would, if rightly taken, excite the deepest repentance and self-abasement. To be told that they had sinned, that the wrath of heaven was kindled against them, that an offering, and even a petition for mercy, would not be accepted at their hands that it must be presented by a mediator, and that this mediator should be the very person whom

* Deut. vii. 7. ix. 1—6.

they had despised and condemned as smitten of God and afflicted, was altogether so humiliating, they that had been unbelievers, and left to their own spirit, they would have rejected it with a sullen scorn, equal to that with which many in our day reject the mediation of Jesus Christ. But they were good men, and followed the divine direction, humiliating as it was, with implicit obedience. *They did as the Lord commanded them: the Lord also accepted Job* To them, therefore, this direction must have imparted a new set of views and feelings: as full of humility, thankfulness, conciliation, and brotherly love, as their speeches had been of pride folly, and bitterness.

Such is the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine of atonement. But, humbling as this doctrine is in itself, it may be so perverted as to become quite another thing, and productive of an opposite effect. If God as a lawgiver be held up as an Egyptian task-master, and the mercy of the Saviour be magnified at his expense; if his atonement be considered rather as a victory over the law, than as an honour done to it; if his enduring the curse be supposed to exonerate us from obeying the precepts; if, in consequence of his having laid down his life, we think more lightly of sin, and imagine it to be a less dangerous evil; finally, if, from the full satisfaction which he has made to divine justice, we reckon ourselves to be freed not only from punishment, but from the *desert* of it, and warranted not merely to implore mercy in his name, but to *claim it as a right;* we are in possesion of a scheme abhorrent to the gospel, and not a little productive of spiritual pride. Such views of the atonement excite an irreverent familiarity with God, and in some cases a daring boldness in approaching him; yet such is the strength of the delusion, it passes for intimate communion with him!

An atonement has respect to justice, and justice to the law or rule which men have violated. If this be worthy of being traduced by a servant of Christ, it was worthy of the same treatment from his Lord and Master; and then instead of being honoured by his life and death, it ought to have been annulled, both in respect of him and of us. The doctrine of the cross, according to this view of things, was so far from being a display of the divine

glory, that it must have been a most shocking exhibition of injustice.

Every instance of punishment among men is a sort of atonement to the justice of the country, the design of which is to restore the authority of government which transgression has impaired. But if the law itself be bad, or the penalty too severe, every sacrifice that is made to it must be an instance of cruelty; and should the king's own son interpose as a substitute, to save the lives of a number of offenders, whatever might be the love expressed on his part, it would be shocking in the government to permit it, even though he might survive his sufferings. Could the public opinion be expressed on such an occasion, it would be to this effect:—'There was no necessity for any atonement: it does no honour, but dishonour to the king; and though he has liberated the unhappy men, there was no grace in the act, but mere justice: the law, instead of being maintained by a suffering substitute, ought to have been repealed.' It is easy to see from hence, that in proportion as the law is depreciated, the gospel is undermined, and the necessity, glory, and grace of the atonement rendered void.

It is probable, there are not many who would in so many words deny the law to be holy, just, and good: on the contrary, there is little doubt but most would in argument acknowledge as much as this; but if on all other occasions they speak of it with disrespect, comparing it to the task-masters of Pharaoh, and disown the authority of its precepts to be binding on them, such acknowledgments can be considered as nothing more than compliments to the express words of scripture. If they really believed the law to be holy, just, and good, and holiness, justice and goodness were their delight; however they might renounce all dependance upon "the works of it," for acceptance with God, they could not object to being under it as a rule of duty. It is the law as abused, or as turned into a way of life in opposition to the gospel, (for which it was never given to a fallen creature,) that the Apostle depreciates it; and not as the revealed will of God, or as the immutable standard of right and wrong. In this view he delighted in it, and if we be Christians we also shall delight in it, and if so, we shall not object to being under it as a rule of duty; for no man ob-

jects to be ruled by the precepts which he loves. Still less shall we allow ourselves to disparage it, and to represent the redemption of Christ as delivering us from its tyrannical yoke. So far as any man is a Christian, he is of Christ's mind, and that was to account it his meat and drink to do the will of his Father.

If the law be really an oppressive and tyrannical yoke, it was requisite that our deliverance from it should have been by *power*, and not by *price*. This is the way in which we are delivered from the power of darkness. No satisfaction was made to Satan, inasmuch as his dominion was usurped. Captivity was led captive, and the prey taken from the mighty. If such had been the power which the law had over us, such would have been the nature of our redemption from the curse of it. But here the case is different. Christ, however strong his love was to us, did not ask our salvation at the expense of law or justice. He would rather die than admit of such a thought. He was actually set forth to be a propitiatory sacrifice, that he might *declare his righteousness in the remission of sins, and be just in justifying them that believe in him.* After all this, is it credible that he should teach a doctrine, and approve of preaching, the object of which is to traduce that which in life and death it was his delight to honour?

The *Mediation and Intercession of Christ* are founded on his propitiatory sacrifice, and carry on the great design of saving sinners in a way honourable to the law. Mediations require to be conducted according to the nature of the case. If a father and son be at variance, and a common friend interpose to effect a reconciliation, his first inquiry is, 'Is there any fault in the case?' If it be a mere misunderstanding, an explanation is sufficient. If fault exists, and it be on both sides, there will be ground for mutual concession. But if the father be wholly in the right, and the son have offended him without cause, he must do every thing to honour the one and humble the other. To propose, that after the reconciliation, the former system of family government should be superceded, and that the son in future should be under a different rule, or any thing implying a reflection on the father's former conduct, would render the breach wider instead of healing it. Such is the nature of the case between God and man. If our Ad-

vocate with the Father had pleaded for the superceding of God's authority as Lawgiver, he had proved himself utterly unqualified for his undertaking. But he *loved righteousness and hated iniquity; and therefore God, his God, anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellows* and granted him the desire of his heart. Though he undertook the cause of sinners, yet he never pleaded in extenuation of their sins; but presented his own blood as a consideration that they might be forgiven. The Advocate for sinners is, as it was requisite it should be—*Jesus Christ the righteous.*

In receiving the doctrine of the mediation and intercession of Christ, it is of great importance that we consider it *in harmony with the grace of God.* Socinians, who reject the atonement, are continually alleging its inconsistency with the idea of grace. 'If forgiveness,' say they, 'requires a satisfaction, how can it be free?' And the way in which satisfaction has been sometimes held up by good men, has furnished but too much of a handle for their objections. If the atonement be considered as that through which mercy is exercised *consistently with justice*, there will be nothing found in it inconsistent with grace; but if the benefits resulting from it be considered as objects of *claim*, or the bestowment of them as *required by justice*, it will be otherwise. It is doubtless becoming the character of God to fulfil his own gracious engagements. Thus "God is not *unrighteous* to forget our works of faith and labours of love;" and thus "he is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins. But if salvation were so obtained by the propitiation of Christ, as that the bestowment of it should be required by essential justice, it had not been an object of *intercession* on his part, nor of *prayer* on ours. That which essential justice requires is not of grace, but of debt, and admits of the language of appeal, rather than of prayer. These consequences have been actually drawn: the intercession of Christ in heaven has been considered as possessing the nature of a *demand.* But whatever merit there was in his obedience unto death, or to whatever reward he was entitled from the remunerative justice of God; yet, in *asking the life of another*, and that other *a rebel*, it must not be in the language of demand. I recollect nothing in the scriptures favourable to such an idea. The words of our Lord, in John

xvii. 24. *Father I* WILL *that they also whom thou hast given me be with me*, &c. express (says Campbell) no more than a petition.* And as to *our* omitting to pray for the forgiveness of sin, or asking for it in the language of demand, I should hope no serious Christians can act on such principles, though some Antinomians have appeared to do so.

I am far from thinking that every one who has pleaded for salvation as a matter required by essential justice, is an Antinomian; but such may be the tendency of the principle, notwithstanding. Every one that knows any thing of the gospel, knows that one of its grand peculiarities is, that it harmonizes the justice and mercy of God in the forgiveness of sins. In it *mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other.* In it God is *just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* But the principle in question pleads for justice in such a way as to exclude mercy. To say mercy is exercised *consistently with justice*, is to represent them as harmonizing in a sinner's salvation: but to say it is *required by justice*, is to say what is self-contradictory. If it be required by justice, it is not mercy, or at least not undeserved favour. If justice, for instance, require that the believer in Jesus be justified, this is more than the covenant engagements of the Father to the Son requiring it: it amounts to this, that it would be an act of essential injustice in God to condemn him. But if so, we are not justified *freely by grace, through the redemption of Christ*, but as a matter of right, in which grace has nothing to do beyond the gift of Christ.

It has been thought that the idea of salvation being only *consistent with justice*, and not *required by* it, tends to diminish the efficacy and value of Christ's merits. But, as has been hinted already, the efficacy and value of these are in nowise affected by this principle: for whatever be their value, they cannot render our salvation a matter due to us on the footing of justice, unless they render *us meritorious.* If atonement had been made by us, and not by another for us; that is, if we ourselves had sustained the full pen-

* Hence he renders it, "Father I *would*," &c. and quotes Matt. xii. 38. xxvi. 39. Mark vi. 25. 35. where the same word is used for request, not demand. See his note.

alty of the law, we might have claimed an exemption from farther punishment as a matter of right; and if, in addition to this, we had yielded perfect obedience to its precepts, we might claim justification as a matter of right: but if all this be accomplished for us, by *another as our substitute*, though the benefit may be ours, yet it will be altogether of grace, and not by the requirement of justice. It is no less of grace than if we had been forgiven without an atonement. This will appear from the atonements under the Mosaic law. In cases wherein the sinner was himself made a sacrifice, justice took place, and grace and forgiveness were excluded. *He shall surely be put to death, his blood shall be upon him.* But in cases wherein a substitutional sacrifice was admitted, and the sinner escaped, it was of forgiving grace, the same as if there had been no sacrifice offered. *The priest shall make an* ATONEMENT *for him, and his sins shall be forgiven him.* A substitutional sacrifice was an expedient devised by the Lawgiver, that the exercise of mercy might be consistent with justice, or that God might forgive sin, without seeming to connive at it: but it was no part of its design to destroy or diminish the grace of forgiveness, or to render the deliverance, of a sinner a matter of claim.

To establish the principle of *claim*, it is necessary to prove that there was such a *union* between Christ and his people, as not merely to furnish a ground for their sins *being reckoned* as his, but for their really and properly being his: not merely that he might *bear the curse* due to them; but that, in sustaining it, he should suffer according to his desert: not merely that his righteousness should be *reckoned* or *imputed* to them, by a gracious act of the Lawgiver; but that, reckoning things as they are, and adjudging to every one what is his own, it should be really and properly theirs: not merely that they should receive the benefits of his merits, but that they themselves should become meritorious, or deserving of all that they receive. But this amounts to Christ and his people being *one and the same conscious being*; and if so, there is no propriety in saying he *died for them*, seeing they themselves died in his death, and redeemed themselves by their own blood.

It is this notion of the atonement, or what leads to this, that is continually held up by the Socinians, and which lays the foundation for all that they have advanced, with any degree of plausibility, on its inconsistency with grace. *Substitutionary* atonement, or atonement made for the sin of *another*, whether it were by slain beasts, or by any other means, in nowise interferes with grace. In *pecuniary* satisfactions, if the creditor be but paid, whether it be by the debtor, or by a surety on his behalf, *he has received his due*, and no room is left for remission, or for grace; but it is not so here. In cases of *crime*, nothing can render deliverance a matter of claim, but the criminal himself having suffered the full penalty of the law. Deliverance by the interposition of a mediator, though it may answer the great ends of justice, and so be *consistant with it*, yet can never be *required by it*, nor be any other than an act of grace. This truth, while it repels the objections of Socinianism, corrects the abuses of Antinomianism.

The doctrine of *Justification by faith in Jesus Christ, without the works of the law*, is in itself exceedingly humbling: for it is no other than *God's justifying the ungodly*, or accepting to favour a believing sinner, not for any worthiness in him, but for the sake of his righteousness in whom he believeth. It relates to the way in which we who are unrighteous are accepted of God as the lawgiver of the world, and treated as righteous. If we had retained our original righteousness, justice itself would have justified us; but having sinned, the question, How shall man be justified with God? is too difficult for created wisdom to solve. Whatever delight the Creator takes in honouring and rewarding righteousness, there is none left in this apostate world for him to honour or reward. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If any child of Adam, therefore, be now accepted and rewarded as righteous, it must be entirely on different ground from that of his own righteousness. What ground this could be, God only knew.

This great difficulty, however, is solved by the gospel. We are *justified freely by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness in the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this*

time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Hence it is that justification is ascribed to *faith*, not as a virtue which God consented to accept for righteousness instead of perfect obedience, but as receiving the righteousness of his Son, of which our justification is the reward. Justification by faith, and being "made righteous by the obedience of Christ," are the same thing. Believing in him, we are *united* to him, and so possess a revealed interest in him, and in all the benefits and blessings arising from his obedience unto death.* This righteousness is *imputed* to us, or *counted* by the Lawgiver of the world, in his treatment of us, as if it were our own. Not that it really *is* our own; for then should we cease to be guilty and unworthy, and might draw nigh to God as meritorious beings: but as Christ was "made sin for us," though in respect to his real character he "knew no sin;" so we are "made the righteousness of God in him," though in respect to our real character we are worthy of death.

To believe for righteousness is to *receive it as a free gift*, and so stands opposed to justification by the works of the law, which is to receive it as the reward of our own doings. Hence it is said to be "of faith," that it may be of grace. Faith is necessary to justification, and so is repentance to forgiveness; but neither the one nor the other is necessary as a cause, or as being that for the sake of which we are justified or pardoned. With respect to the meritorious or procuring cause, nothing is necessary but the righteousness of Christ. The sinner, in his justification, is considered as altogether unworthy, and even ungodly. As such our Redeemer died for us, and as such he justifies us.

Being accepted in the Beloved, our services also are accepted through him. The Lord had respect not only to Abel, but to his offering. Thus it is our duties become awardable, and that the promises of God are made to them. There are no promises made to the doings of unbelievers, however fair they may appear in the eyes of men.

* Rom. viii. 1. Phil. iii. 9. 1 Cor. i. 30.

In fine, being thus justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and draw near to a throne of grace, with humble boldness, as to a father.

But the subject may be viewed in such a light as to become another doctrine, and to be productive of another spirit. Conceive of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as that by which we are not only treated as righteous, but are *actually* without spot in the sight of God; imagine that he can think a character to be different from what it really is; and suppose justification to include such a remission of our sins, past, present, and to come, as renders daily prayer for forgiveness unnecessary, and even improper, and our soul will be lifted up, as not to be upright in us. It is true, that God graciously deals with his people, not according to their sins, but according to the righteousness of his Son; but this is without being blinded to their faults, or the less offended with them for their sins. It is olso true, that they are delivered from a state of exposedness to condemnation, on their first believing, and that provision is made for the remission of all their future transgressions: but, as the scriptures pronounce no sinner justified till he believes, so they declare no sin to be forgiven till it is confessed and forsaken.*

To obviate the plain testimony of scripture, which declares repentance to be necessary to forgiveness, it is commonly alleged that this does not mean forgiveness itself, but a sense of it in the mind: the thing itself is supposed to exist in the secret purpose of God. But forgiveness itself, is no more a secret purpose in the mind of God, than it is a sensation or persuasion in the mind of man; rather it is the gracious purpose of God as *revealed in the scriptures.* Those sins which *the scriptures* forgive, are forgiven; and those which they retain, are retained: but the scriptures declare no sin to be forgiven which is unlamented.

I do not accuse all who have gone into the unscriptural notions to which I refer of being Antinomians. Many godly people have had their minds greatly perplexed on this subject, who yet have retained and felt so much of the truth as to "count all things but loss that they might win Christ, and be found in him,

* Prov. xxviii. 13. 1 John i. 9.

not having their own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Justification has by many been considered as a gracious purpose in the mind of God not to impute sin, but the righteousness of Christ, to an elect sinner. Hence as no new purpose can arise in the all-comprehending mind, it has been considered as *eternal;* and what is denominated in the scriptures, justification by *faith*, as the revelation or discovery of it to the soul. But faith has to do with only revealed truth : supposing, therefore, that it were true of a sinner, that he was justified in the divine purpose from eternity, yet this being no where revealed of him in the scriptures, it cannot be by faith that he discovers it. It must either be by a new revelation from heaven, or by an impulse on his imagination, which he unhappily mistakes for one.

But neither is it true that justification consists in the purpose of God not to impute sin, but the righteousness of Christ, to an elect sinner. It does not belong to the secret, but to the revealed will of God. It is for a believing sinner to be exempted from the curse of the law, and entitled to the blessings of the gospel, not in the divine purpose, but according to the will of God as *revealed in the scriptures.*

If justification be a *law term*, and opposed to condemnation, as I believe it is generally allowed to be, it cannot be any thing existing merely in the divine mind. Neither the one nor the other is a purpose in the mind of the Judge, but a sentence passed in open Court. Condemnation, as opposed to justification in the scriptures, is not an appointment of sinners to future punishment, but a state of exposedness to the curse of the law. The former is not true of elect sinners, even while unbelievers, but the latter is.* Whatever be the secret purpose of God in their favour, so long as they reject the saviour *the wrath of God abideth upon them;* or, which is the same thing, all the threatnings and curses of the divine law stand in full force against them. But if condemnation consist not in God's purpose finally to punish, justification consists not in his purpose finally to acquit ; and if the former

* *We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others,* said Paul, of himself and the believing Ephesians. Chap. ii. 3.

be that exposedness to the curse of the law which, according to the sentence *pronounced in the scriptures*, belongs to every transgressor, the latter must be that change of state, condition, or standing, with respect to the Lawgiver of the world, which takes place on our believing in Christ, and in which the sentence is revoked in respect of us, and we henceforth possess a revealed interest in all the blessings and promises of the gospel. I say, a *revealed interest*; for as the sentence of condemnation stood against us *in the scriptures*, so that of justification must there stand for us. It is ot the purpose which may exist in the divine mind, nor the impulse, impression, or persuasion which may have place in our minds, but *the voice of God in his word concerning us*, that determines our state, or denominates us justified or condemned.

When the revealed will of God is disregarded as a rule of life, it is common for the mind to be much occupied about his secret will, or his decrees, as a substitute for the other. It is thus that men stumble upon the dark mountains, and fall into many dangerous errors, besides those on justification. To what other cause can it be attributed, that the *invitations of the gospel*, instead of being addressed to sinners considered merely as guilty and miserable, should be confined to *sensible* sinners, or to persons who though they have never yet come to Christ, taken his yoke, or learned his spirit, are nevertheless supposed to be in possession of something that proves them to be of the elect, and therefore entitled to have the invitations addressed to them! Who can trace the delusion which must arise from such a doctrine? If a sinner is ever invited to come to Christ, it is when he is considered as sufficiently *sensible* of his lost condition; and this is held up, not merely as that which is necessary in the nature of things to his coming, but as giving him a warrant to come. Thus the sinner is taught to think himself one of God's elect, while as yet he has neither repentance toward God, nor faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

To what is it owing but to the substituting of the *secret for the revealed will of God*, that Christians should be afraid to pray for the salvation of their neighbours, ministers for that of their hearers, and parents for that of their children, lest they should not

prove to be of the elect? If nothing more were meant, than that in all our prayers there should be a condition implied, namely, that what we ask is according to the will of God, there could be no just objection to it. But if, lest what we ask should not accord with the divine purpose, we refrain from asking any thing, our conduct will resemble that of the slothful servant, who, from certain notions which he entertained of his Lord's character, concluded that there was no encouragement for him to do any thing, and therefore went and buried his Lord's talent in the earth. And why should we neglect to pray for our neighbours, our hearers, or our children only, lest they should not be elected? Why not also, on the same ground, neglect to pray for *ourselves?* There must have been a time when we had no ground to conclude ourselves elected; and did we wait till we had obtained evidence of this, before we began to pray for the salvation of our own souls? If we did not, and yet object on this account to pray for others, surely self-love must be the Alpha and Omega of our religion.

Paul, as has been already observed, believed and taught the doctrine of election: yet in the same Epistle, nay, in the same chapter, he declared his most anxious solicitude for the salvation of his unbelieving *brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh.* And wherefore? Because he desired any thing contrary to the will of God? No; but not knowing what was the secret will of God respecting individuals, he was satisfied with obeying his commandments. God, he well knew, would regulate *his own conduct* by his wise and righteous decrees, but they could be no rule to him, inasmuch as they were utterly beyond his knowledge.* It was for him to obey the precept, and to leave the issue to his disposal, who *worketh all things after the council of his own will.*

The doctrines of *Efficacious Grace*, and the *final Perseverance of Believers*, are in themselves of a humbling nature. They imply the utter depravity of the human heart, as being proof against every thing but omnipotent love; and the proneness of the best of men to draw back even to perdition, were it not that they are

* See Dr. Ryland's Sermon, before the subscribers to the Stepney Institution, preached at Devonshire Square, 1812. pp. 31—34.

preserved by grace. When a serious Christian remembers the hateful enmity with which he formerly opposed the divine authority, and resisted to the utmost the very calls of mercy, his soul is humbled within him. 'It was God,' says he, '*who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved me, even when I was dead in sins, hath quickened me together with Christ. By grace I am saved!*' Or, if he survey his life from the beginning of his Christian course, and the innumerable defects and miscarriages of it are brought to his recollection, shame and confusion overwhelm him. 'He is God,' saith he, '*and changeth not*: therefore it is that I am *not consumed!*' But these important doctrines may be perverted: and being so, that which is retained may be as false as they are true, and as productive of spiritual pride as they are of humility. If the influence of either sin or grace be supposed to destroy our accountableness to God; If the necessity of regeneration be contended for, on some other ground than our having been degenerate; if it consist not in the renewal of the mind to a right spirit, but in the communicating of a principle essentially different from any thing to which we were obliged in our unregeneracy, or from that which we possessed in a state of original purity; if this principle and its opposite, *the new and the old man*, be considered as agents, and the man himself not an agent, but a passive spectator of their conflicts; if a confident persuasion of our being the children of God to be taken for Christian faith, and the apprehensions excited by a guilty conscience be treated as unbelief; finally, if perseverance be considered as a certain connexion between a beginning and an end, while an actual progress in grace and holiness is either denied or overlooked; it is easy to perceive what kind of effects will follow.

It is from these fond notions that men imagine themselves possessed of such extraordinary *knowledge*, as to be entitled to look down upon all around them, as the Jews in the time of our Saviour looked down upon the Gentiles, treating them as dogs. Not only are *natural men* despised, as though destitute of common understanding; but the first parent of our race, created in the image of God, is accounted a natural man, and as such utterly in-

capable of knowing what they know. Even the angels of heaven are in this respect considered as greatly their inferiors.

Much is said in the scriptures of *living by faith;* and truly understood, it is of the greatest importance. Without it there is neither the progress nor existence of true religion. To live by faith on the son of God, is not only to be crucified to the objects of sense which surround us, and alive to unseen realities; but to feel habitually divested of self-sufficiency, and to place our whole confidence in the promised grace of Christ. Such a confidence has revealed truth for its foundation, and operates in a way of unfeigned humility. Hence the language of the prophet: *Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him*: BUT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH. But if a life of faith be understood to mean a continued, unshaken confidence *that we are converted, and shall be saved.* this is entirely another thing, That true Christians may know that they have passed from death to life, is readily granted; this, however, is not an object of *faith*, but of *consciousness.* It is nowhere revealed in the scriptures concerning us that we are true Christians; therefore it can be no exercise of faith to be persuaded of it. A believer may be conscious that he is such, and that he loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity; and this faith and love having the promise of salvation, he may be, probably, too certain that he shall be saved. *If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.* The apostles and primitive Christians appear to have entertained little or no doubt of their personal Christianity. Why? *Because great grace was upon them all.* These affording a living and constant evidence of their being born of God. But when they speak of *holding fast the beginning of their confidence to the end*, their meaning is not that they are to maintain a good opinion of their own state; but an unshaken attachment to the gospel, in the declarations and promises of which they had from the beginning confided. The most unshaken persuasion of the goodness of our own state may be mere self-confidence; and if it operate in a way of religious vaunting, there is every reason for concluding it will be found nothing better. Such was that of the Pharisees, who boasted that God was their Father, and so trusted that they were righteous, and des-

spised others. The soul of such a man is *lifted up*, and therefore *is not upright in him*. Instead of living by faith, his life is that to which a life of faith is directly opposed.

Such doctrine has a bewitching influence upon minds of a certain cast. It is a species of religious flattery, which feeds their vanity and soothes their selfishness: yet they call it the food of their souls. Like intoxicating liquors to a drunkard, its tendency is to destroy: but yet it seems necessary to their existence; so much so, that for the sake of it, they dispise the bread of life.

[No part of the preceding Treatise was fully prepared for the press by the author, though the manuscript lay by him for several years. It is supposed that this SECOND PART was not finished, and he had not so much as entered on a THIRD. Its *practical influence on the temper and conduct of its professors*, is, however, abundantly manifest in the writings and preaching of its principal patrons, and in the continual ebullitions of pride, censoriousness, and bitterness, which almost universally proceed from their admirers. The former are scarcely ever known to drop a sentence tending to produce in their admirers the least degree of godly jealousy over themselves: and the latter never hesitate to revile all the ministers of the gospel who will not encourage them in their presumptuous confidence of their own safety, and their utter aversion to the very name of duty and moral obligation.

The review of the *Voice of Years*, in the *Baptist Magazine*, for June, 1815, pp. 252—254, was one of the last things which Mr. FULLER ever wrote, and is well worthy the attention of all professors who are not fully aware of the pernicious tendency of the Antinomian system. R.]

SPIRITUAL PRIDE:

OR

THE OCCASIONS, CAUSES, AND EFFECTS OF HIGH-MINDEDNESS IN RELIGION;

WITH

CONSIDERATIONS EXCITING TO SELF-ABASEMENT.

INTRODUCTION.

As there is nothing pertaining to holiness which renders us more like our Lord Jesus Christ than lowliness of mind, so there is nothing pertaining to sin which approaches nearer to the image of satan than *pride*. This appears to have been the transgression for which he himself was first condemned, and by which he seduced our first parents to follow his example. It was insinuated to them that they were kept in ignorance and treated as underlings, and that by following his counsel, they would be raised in the scale of being: *Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*

All the evil that is in the world is comprehended in three things—*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.* Each of these cardinal vices implies that man is alienated from God, and that all his affections and thoughts centre in himself: but the last is the most subtile in its influence. It consists in THINKING MORE HIGHLY OF OURSELVES THAN WE OUGHT TO THINK.

It is a mental flatulency that pervades all the soul,, and puffs it up with vain conceits. It is visible to all about us, but to us invisible. It seizes those revenues of glory which are due to God, and applies them to selfish uses. Strength, beauty, genius, opulence, science, the success of labour, and the achievments of enterprize, all are perverted to its purpose. Finally : It renders man his own idol : he worshippeth the creature more than the Creator; he sacrificeth to his own net, and burneth incense to his own drag.

But the particular species of pride which I shall attempt to delineate is that which is *spiritual*, or which has religious excellence, real or supposed, for its object.

Religion is not the only object by which religious professors may be elated ; but the elatedness occasioned by it is that only which is denominated *spiritual pride*.

SECTION I.

THE OCCASIONS, OR OBJECTS, OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

Though a considerable part of the following remarks will have respect to the faults of good men; yet not the whole of them: spiritual pride is not confined to spiritual men. The subject of it indeed must needs be, if not a professor of religion, yet a religious man in his own esteem, but that may be all. One of its principal operations is in a way of *self-righteous hope;* which is the reigning disposition of millions, who have no just claim to the character of religious. And as this is a species of spiritual pride which appears at a very early period, it may be proper to begin with this, and proceed to others in the order in which they are commonly manifested.

The likeness which is drawn by our Saviour of the Pharisees in his time bears a minute resemblance to the character of great numbers in every age. All their works are done to be seen of men, and constitute the ground of their hope of acceptance with God. The sentiments of their hearts in their most devout addresses to their Maker, if put into words, would be to this effect: *God I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican* It is not common for those who pay any regard to the scriptures expressly to arrogate to themselves the honour of making themselves to differ. Most men will thank God that they are what they are; and the Pharisee did the same. Many will now acknowledge, in addition to this, that their hopes of being accepted of God are *through the merits of Jesus Christ:* but it is not by such language that a self-righteous spirit is to be disguised Nor is it peculiar to those whom we call decent characters, *to trust that they are righteous and despise others:* for the same spirit may be seen in the most profligate of mankind. Judg-

ing of themselves by others, they derive comfort; for they can always find characters worse than their own. Reprove a common swearer, and he will thank God he means no harm; for he is frank and open, and not as that liar. Convict a liar, and he will argue that in this wicked world a man cannot live if he always speak truth; and he is not a thief. The thief pleads that he never was guilty of murder; and even the murderer was provoked to it. Thus they can each find worse characters than their own: the motto of each is, *God I thank thee that I am not as other men.*

A minister of the Church of England was some years since appointed chaplain to a certain charitable Asylum, where his constant business would be to visit and converse with persons who, by their own misconduct, were reduced to the most deplorable condition. On receiving his appointment, he thought within himself, 'I shall have one advantage however, I shall not have to encounter a self-righteous spirit.' But on entering his office he soon perceived his mistake, and that there was no less pharisaism in these dregs of society, than among the more refined and sober part of mankind. Much of this spirit is seen *under the convictions and alarms of awakened sinners.* The conflicts of mind, by which many for a long time are deprived of all peace and enjoyment, are no other than the struggles between the gospel way of salvation, and a secret attachment to self-righteousness. When terrified by the threatenings of the word, or the near approach of death, the first refuge to which the sinner usually betakes himself is the promise of amendment. He vows to reform, and this affords him a little ease. For a time, it may be, his gross vices are relinquished; he carefully attends to religious duties; and while this lasts, he flatters himself that he is a better man, and supposes the Almighty is no less pleased with him than he is pleased with himself. If he rest here, his pride proves his eternal overthrow.

But it may be his rest here is short. It commonly proves that vows and resolutions thus made, are like the morning cloud and the early dew that goeth away. A new temptation to some old sin, which was not mortified, but had merely retired during the present alarm, undoes all. Now remorse and fearful apprehensions take possession of the soul, not only on account of its having

sinned against greater light than heretofore, but for destroying its own refuge. The gourd is smitten, and the sinner, exposed as to a vehement east-wind, fainteth. Yet even here spiritual pride will insinuate itself, and offer a species of false comfort. While he is weeping over his sins, and bemoaning the unhappiness of his case, that he should thus undo all his hopes, a soothing thought suggests itself, 'Will not the Almighty have compassion on me for these penitential tears? Surely my mournings will be heard, and my lamentations go up before him!' Many have stopped short here, and, it is to be feared, have missed of eternal life!

But it may be he is disturbed from this repose also. Conscience becomes more enlightened by reading and hearing the word. He is convinced that neither tears nor prayers, nor aught else but the blood-shedding of the Saviour, will take away sin; and that there is no way of being saved by him but by believing in him. Yet a thought occurs, 'Can such a sinner as I believe in Christ? Would it not be presumption to hope that one so unfit and unworthy as I am, should be accepted?' This thought proceeds upon a supposition that some degree of previous fitness or worthiness is necessary to recommend us to the Saviour, which is repugnant to the whole tenor of the gospel; and so long as it continues to influence our decisions, will be an insuperable bar to believing.

Self-righteousness, at some stages, will work in a way of despair. The sinner finding that no duties performed in impenitence and unbelief are any way available, or in the least degree pleasing to God; that no means are pointed out in the scriptures by which a hard-hearted sinner may obtain a heart of flesh; and that, nevertheless, he is told to repent and believe in Jesus, or perish for ever, sinks into despondency. Hard thoughts are entertained of God. He thinks he has taken all possible pains with himself: and if what he possesses be not repentance nor faith, he has no hopes of ever obtaining them. God, it seems to him, requires impossibilities, and can therefore be no other than a hard master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed. The religious efforts of some, like those of the slothful servant, end here. All is given up as a hopeless case, and the

things which their hearts, amidst all their convictions, have been lingering after, are again pursued.

To come to Jesus as a sinner *ready to perish*, justifying God and condemning self, suing for mercy as utterly unworthy, as one of the chief of sinners, pleading mercy merely for the sake of the atonement, is a hard lesson for a self-righteous heart to learn. The shiftings of pride in such cases, are fitly expressed by the sinner's *going about* to establish his own righteousness, and not submitting to the righteousness of God. Like the priests of Dagon, he will set up his idol as long as he can possibly make it stand. But if ever he obtain mercy he must desist. There is no rest for the soul but in coming to Jesus. And if he be once brought to this all his self-righteous strivings, and the hopes which he built upon them, with all his hard thoughts of God for requiring what in his then present state of mind he *could not* comply with, will appear in their true light, the *odious workings of a deceitful and deceived heart.*

Such, and many other are the workings of spiritual pride in the form of a self-righteous spirit under first awakenings: but it is not in this form only, nor at this period only, that it operates. You may have obtained rest for your souls in the doctrine of the cross; you may have communicated your case to others, joined a Christian church, and may purpose to walk in communion with it through life: but still it becomes you to be upon the watch against this as well as other evils to which you are exposed.

The Apostle, in giving directions for the office of a bishop, objects to a *novice*, or one newly converted to the faith; and for this reason, *lest, being lifted up with pride*, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. It is here plainly implied, that the early stages of even true religion, in persons possessed of promising gifts, are attended with peculiar temptations to high-mindedness. Alas! what numerous examples of this are daily apparent in young ministers! The transition, in many instances, is great: from a dejected state of mind, to become guides of others; or from obscure circumstances to be elevated to the situation of a public teacher, attracting the smiles and applauses of the people, are things that few young men are able to bear. When alone, conversing with

God, or with their own souls, they can see many reasons for self-abasement; but when encircled with smiling crowds and loaded with indiscreet applause, these thoughts evaporate. Every one proclaims the preacher's excellence; and surely what every one affirms must be true! In short, he inhales the incense, and becomes intoxicated with its fumes.

Such a man, we sometimes say, possesses talents, but he is aware of them. In one sense a man must needs be aware of them. Humility does not consist in being ignorant of our talents, be they what they may; but in being properly impressed with the *end* for which they are given. The attention of a vain mind is fixed upon the talents themselves, dwelling on them with secret satisfaction, and expecting every one to be sensible of them no less than himself. Hence it is that the most fulsome adulation is acceptable. Hungering and thirsting after applause, he is ever fishing for it, and the highest degrees of it when bestowed, strike but in unison with his own previous thoughts. Hence the flatterer, whom others can easily see through, appears to be a sensible and discerning man, who has discovered that of which the generality of people around him are insensible. Not so the humble. His attention is not fixed so much upon his talents as on the *use* which is required to be made of them. Feeling himself accountable for all that he has received, and conscious of his unspeakable defects in the application of them, he finds matter for continual shame and self-abasement. In this view the greatest of men may consider themselves as the *least of all saints*, and unworthy of a place among them.

Vanity of mind, so far as it relates to our behaviour towards man, will frequently effect its own cure. It is certain to work disgust in others, and that disgust will be followed by neglect, and other mortifying treatment. Thus it is that time and experience, if accompanied by a moderate share of good sense, will rub off the excrescences of youthful folly, and reduce the party to propriety of conduct. And if there be true religion as well as good sense, such things may be the means of really mortifying the evil, and may teach a lesson of genuine humility: but where this is wanting, the change is merely exterior. Though the branches may be

lopped off, the root remains, and is strengthened by time, rather than mortified. Youthful vanity, in these cases, frequently ripens into pride and overbearing contempt.

From the earliest ages of Christianity, those who were possessed of spiritual gifts, and official situations in the church, were in danger of being elated by them. Though the eye cannot in truth say to the hand, *I have no need of thee*, nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you ; yet if there had not been something nearly resembling it in the church, such language would not have been used. Neither would the primitive ministers have been charged not to *lord it over God's heritage*, if such things had never made their appearance. The primitive churches had their Diotrephes, who cast out such as displeased him ;* and such men have not been wanting for successors in every age. This lust of domination has sometimes been formed in preachers, and sometimes in men of opulence among private members ; but commonly in persons, whether preachers or hearers, who are the least qualified for the exercise of legitimate rule. The churches of Christ, as well as all other societies, require to be governed, and he has prescribed laws for this purpose ; but no man is fit to govern but he that is of a meek and lowly disposition. *The greatest of all must be the servant of all.* The authority which he maintains must not be sought after, nor supported by improper measures; but be spontaneously conferred on account of superior wisdom, integrity, and love.

There are various other things, as well as official situations, which furnish occasion for spiritual pride. Members of churches being equal, as members, with their pastors, may assume a kind of democratic consequence, and forget that it is their duty to honour and obey them that have the rule over them in the Lord. If ministers are called the servants of the churches, it is because their lives are laid out in promoting their best interests ; and when this is the case, they are entitled to an affectionate and respectful demeanour. To be a servant of a Christian church is one thing, and to be a slave to the caprice of a few of its members is another. *Whatever it be in which we excel, or imagine ourselves*

* 3 John, 9, 10.

to do so, there it becomes us to beware lest we be lifted up to our hurt. Those differences which are produced by religion itself, may, through the corruptions of our nature, be converted into food for this pernicious propensity.

Those who name the name of Christ, are taught to relinquish the chase of fashionable appearance, and to be *sober and modest in their apparel and deportment:* but while they are renouncing the pride of life in one form, let them beware that they cherish it not in another. We have seen persons whose self-complacency, on account of the plainness of their apparel, has risen to a most insufferable degree of arrogance; and who have appeared to be much more affected by a ribbon or a bonnet on another's head, than by all the abominations of their own hearts. The genuine *adorning* of the Christian is not that of the putting on of apparel; no, not that which is plain, any more than that which is gaudy; *but the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*, which is in the sight of God of great price. To value ourselves on account of outward finery, which, where it is followed, is commonly the case, is offensive to God, and inconsistent with a proper attention to the inner man: but to value ourselves for the contrary may be still more so. The former, though a proof of a vain and little mind, yet is never considered, I suppose, as an exercise of holiness; but the latter is: great stress is laid upon it, and commonly to the neglect of the weightier matters of religion. In short, a righteousness is made of it, which of all things is most odious in the sight of God.

Those who name the name of Christ are taught also to *demean themselves in such a manner* as will naturally inspire respect from persons of character; and this may become a snare to the soul. Religion, by changing the course of a man's conduct, often raises him to a much superior station in society than he occupied before. From being a drunkard, a liar, or in some form a loose character, he becomes sober, faithful, and regular in his conduct. Hence he naturally rises in esteem, and in some cases is entrusted with important concerns. All this is doubtless to the honour of God and religion; but let us beware, lest a self-complacent thought enter our heart, and we be lifted up to our hurt. This species of pride will frequently appear in a scornful behaviour towards others

who are still in their sins, and in a censorious and unforgiving spirit towards such members of the church as have conducted themselves with less regularity than ourselves. A lowly mind will drop a tear over the evil courses of the ungodly, and feeling its obligations to renewing and keeping grace that hath made the difference, will find matter even in a public execution for humiliation, prayer, and praise. The falls of fellow-christians will likewise excite a holy fear and trembling, and induce a greater degree of watchfulness and supplication, lest we should in a similar way dishonour the name of God; and if called to unite with others in the exercise of scriptural discipline, it will be with a spirit of tenderness; not for the purpose of revenge, but of recovery. Seest thou a man whose resentments rise high when another falls, who is fierce and clamorous for the infliction of censure, and whose anger cannot be otherwise appeased, there is little reason to expect that he will stand long, *He thinketh he standeth:* let him take heed lest he fall!

He whose character is established by a steady and uniform conduct, is doubtless worthy of our esteem: but if with this he be unfeeling towards others less uniform, there are three of four questions which it might be well for him to consider. First: Whether the difference between him and them be owing so much to the prevalence of Christian principles, as to other causes. It may arise merely from a difference in *natural temper*. The sin which easily besets them may be of a kind which exposes them to the censures of the world; while his may be something more private, which does not come under their cognizance. It may arise from a greater regard to *reputation* in him than in them. Some men picque themselves much more than others upon the immaculacy of their character. But these are motives which, if weighed in the balances, will be found wanting. Secondly: Whether a censorious spirit towards those who have fallen does not prove that we arrogate to ourselves the difference, and depend upon ourselves for the resisting of temptation. We may *thank God*, in words, that *we are not as other men*, and so did the Pharisee; but we may be certain, while this spirit prevails, that God is not the rock on which we rest. Whether arrogancy and self-dependence be not as odious in the sight of God as the greatest outward vices; and whether it be

not likely that he will give us up to the latter, as a punishment for the former? We might have thought it a pity that so eminent a character as Simon Peter, one that was to take so important a part in spreading the gospel, should not have been preserved from so shameful a denial of his Lord. He prayed for him that *his faith should not fail*: why did he not pray that he should be either exempted from the trial, or preserved from falling in it? Surely if his self-confidence had not been more offensive to Christ than even his open denial of him, it had been so: but as it was, rather than he should be indulged in spiritual pride, he must be rolled in the dirt of infamy.

God abhors the occasional exercises of self-confidence in his own people, and still more the habitual self-complacency of hypocrites. I remember a professor of religion, a member of one of our churches, who, for a series of years, maintained a very uniform character. He was constant in his attendance on all opportunities. At his own expense, he erected a place of worship in his village, for the occasional preaching of the gospel. Few men were more respected both by the world and by the church. To the surprise of every one that knew him, all at once he was found to have been guilty of fornication. The church of which he was a member excluded him. From this time he sunk into a kind of sullen despondency, shunning all company and conversation, and giving himself up to melancholy. His friends felt much for him, and would often represent to him the mercy of God to backsliders, who return to him in the name of Jesus. But all was of no account: he was utterly inconsolable. His sorrow did not appear to be of that kind, which, while it weeps for sin, cleaves to the Saviour: but rather, like *the sorrow of the world which worketh death*, was accompanied with a hard heart, and seemed to excite nothing unless it were a fruitless sigh. I well recollect having some conversation with him at the time, and that his state of mind struck me in an unfavourable light. It appeared to me, that the man, in the height of his profession, was eaten up with spiritual pride; that God had let loose the reins of his lust to the staining of his glory, and that now looking upon his reputation as irrecoverably lost, he sunk into despair.—A few years after, when his friends had begun to despair of him, all at once he

wanted to come before the church, and be restored to his place. In his confession, little was said of the evil of his sin, or of the dishonour brought upon the name of Christ by it ; but of certain extraordinary impulses which he had received, by which the pardon of his sin was sealed to him. The church, though with some hesitation, received him. They were soon under the necessity, however, of re-excluding him, as from that time he became a most self-important and contentious Antinomian.

God, in calling sinners by his grace, has given great proof of his sovereignty ; passing over the wise and prudent, and revealing himself to babes ; the mighty and the noble, and choosing the base; yea, the devout and the honourable, and showing mercy to publicans and sinners. This is, doubtless, of a humbling nature, and its design was that *no flesh should glory in his presence.* But even in this case, there is an avenue at which spiritual pride may insinuate itself; and it seems to have found its way among the believing Gentiles. Hence the following language : *Boast not against the branches : but if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith : be not high-minded, but fear.* It is easy to perceive how the same thoughts may be admitted in weak, ignoble, and once profligate characters, who have obtained mercy, while others more respectable are yet in their sins.

Moreover, the Christian religion tends to *enlighten* and *enlarge* the mind. Men that have lived a number of years in the grossest ignorance, on becoming serious Christians have gradually obtained a considerable degree of intelligence. They have not only been spiritually illuminated, so as to read the scriptures as it were with other eyes, and to discourse on divine subjects with clearness and advantage ; but have formed a habit of reading many other useful publications, and of thinking over their contents. All this is to the honour of Christianity : but through the corruption of the heart it may become a snare. It is true that spiritual knowledge, in its own nature, tends to humble the soul both in the sight of God and man : but all the knowledge that good men possess is not spiritual; and that which is so, when it comes to be reflected upon in unwor-

thier moments, may furnish food for self-complacency. Neither are all whose minds are enlightened by the gospel, and whose light is so far operative as even to effect some change of conduct, good men: we read of some who *escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour*, who were *afterwards entangled and overcome.** An influx of knowledge, to some men, like an influx of wealth to others, is more than they are able to bear, and if they have not the grace of God at heart as a balance, they will certainly be overset. A disposition for raising difficulties and speculating upon abstruse and unprofitable questions, a captiousness in hearing, an eagerness for disputing, and an itch for teaching, are certain indications of a vain mind, which at best is but half instructed, and, in many cases, destitute of the truth. Such characters are minutely described by Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy. *Give no heed*, saith he, *to fables, and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith. The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.*

If a little knowledge happen to unite with a litigious temper, it is a dangerous thing. Such characters are the bane of churches. If they might be believed they are the faithful few, who contend for the faith once delivered to the saints: but they know not what manner of spirit they are of, nor consider that there is a species of *contention* that *cometh only by pride*. There were men of this stamp in the times of the Apostle Paul, and whose character he described, with the effects produced by their wrangling. Such an one, saith he, is *proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whence cometh envy, strife, railings, evil-surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth.* It is to be hoped that some, who have manifested this litigious spirit, may not be altogether *destitute of the truth*; and it may be worthy of notice that the persons referred to by the

* 2 Peter ii. 10.

Apostle are not *thus* denominated, but are supposed to kindle the fire which *men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth*, keep alive. It is doubtful, however, if not more than doubtful, whether the description given of *them* will admit of hope in their favour. But if it will, and the same hope be admitted of some litigious spirits in our times, it is doubtless a very wicked thing to furnish the enemies of religion with brands, as I may say, wherewith to burn the temple of God.

Another branch of this species of pride is seen in the conduct of professors who will *take such liberties, and go such lengths in conformity to the world, as frequently prove a stumbling-block to the weak and the tender-hearted.* If reproved for it, they are seldom at a loss in vindicating themselves, attributing it to a more liberal and enlarged way of thinking, and ascribing the objections of others to weakness, and a contractedness of mind. Thus some men can join in the chase, frequent the assembly room, or visit the theatre, and still think themselves entitled to the character of Christians, and perhaps to a place in a Christian church. A case nearly resembling this occurred in the primitive times. The heathen sacrifices were accompanied with feasts, at which the people ate of that which had been offered to their gods. When a number of Corinthian idolaters, who had always lived in this practice, became Christians, it proved a snare to them. They seem to have thought it hard to be obliged to deny themselves of these social repasts. Some of them ventured to break through; and when spoken to on the subject, pleaded that the *idol was nothing*, and therefore could have no influence on the food; adding, that they were not so void of *knowledge* as not to be able to distinguish between the one and the other. Paul, in answer, first reasons with them on *their own principles.* 'You have knowledge . . . . . what do you know? That an Idol is nothing in the world, and there is none other God but one. Very well: we know the same. You it seems, by your superior discernment, can partake of the food simply as food, without considering it as offered to an idol, and so can preserve your consciences from being defiled. Be it so; yet *there is not in every one this knowledge.* Granting, therefore, that the thing itself, as performed by you, is innocent; it becomes an

occasion of stumbling to others. Your mental reservations are unknown to them: while, therefore, you preserve your consciences from guilt, theirs may may be defiled in following your example. And why boast of your *knowledge? knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any one think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*'

Having thus condemned their vain conduct, even upon their own principles, the Apostle proceeds to show that it is *in itself sinful*, as participating of idolatry! *Flee from idolatry! I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the* COMMUNION *of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the* COMMUNION *of the body of Christ? Behold Israel after the flesh, are not they who eat of the sacrifices* PARTAKERS *of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing? But this I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with demons! Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?—Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

This admirable counsel will serve as an universal test of right and wrong. Instead of vindicating fleshly indulgences, and priding ourselves on the superiority of our knowledge to that of others, before we engage, let us seriously ask ourselves whether that which we are about to do be capable of being done *to the glory of God?* We can take exercise, and enjoy agreeable society, with various other things, for the purpose of unbending and recreating the mind. By these means we are enabled to return to the duties of our stations with renewed vigour. In such cases we should feel no difficulty in asking a divine blessing upon them to this end. But can we pursue the chase, frequent the theatre, or unite at the card table, with such an object in view? Dare we pray for a divine blessing to attend these exercises, before we engage in them? If not, they must needs be sinful.

Moreover, Christianity confers great and important *privileges* upon those who embrace it. *To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. They are justified freely by his grace, through the re-*

demption that is in Christ Jesus. However they may have been estranged from God, and every thing that is good, they are now *no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.* The various distinctions of *male and female, rich and poor, bond and free,* are here of no account, *all are one in Christ Jesus.* This is, undoubtedly, one of the glories of the gospel, and that which proves it to be a religion framed for man. In its own nature it is also adapted to fill the soul with humility and gratitude. The natural language inspired by a proper sense of it is, *Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?* But even this may be converted into food for spiritual pride. To be raised from worse than nothing, and placed among *the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty,* is a wonderful transition; and, if contemplated in an unfavourable state of mind, may prove the occasion of evil. A place and a name in a Christian church, though in the esteem of some persons reproachful, yet in that of others may be honourable; and the party be much more affected by it in this than in the other. Members of churches have been known to be more than a little vain of the distinction. In some it has operated in a way of turbulence; leading a member to watch with an evil eye every measure that did not originate with himself, as if it were aimed to raze the foundations of all religion. In others it has operated in a way of meanness. Pleased with the familiarity and friendly treatment which, while their conduct is uniform, they receive from men of superior stations, they have no principle of their own; their study is to please others, rather than to show themselves approved unto God. The same persons, if guilty of any thing which exposes them to censure, commonly discover far more concern for the *dishonour* of the thing, than for the sin of it: and their confessions wear the appearance, not so much of the humble acknowledgments of a contrite spirit, as of the abject cringings of a mind terrified at the idea of losing its consequence.

From an idea of the honour and privileges attached to Christianity, some have been tempted to look down upon their carnal connexions as though they were beings of an inferior nature. Religious children have been in danger of losing a proper filial re-

spect towards their irreligious parents, and religious servants towards their irreligious masters. Indeed, we have heard heavy complaints against religious servants. Some have resolved, on this account, to employ none of them. I hope this is far from being a general case. Within the sphere of my observation there are, I am persuaded, more respectable families who prefer them than otherwise. I may add, that such complaints too often proceed from persons who either are prejudiced against religion, or who possess but a small portion of it. Nor are their declarations confined to servitude; but generally extended to all dealings with religious people. I have heard men of extensive connexions in the world, however, speak a very different language. 'Of mere professors,' say they, 'we have no opinion; but give us men of religion to deal with: others may be held by their honour, and their interest; but that is all: a religious man is a man of principle.' But true it is, that many have acted as though their extraordinary hopes and privileges as Christians tended to free them, in some degree at least, from the ordinary obligations of men; and as though it were beneath them to respect and honour those persons who are destitute of piety. The repeated injunctions of the New Testament on this head, while they aquit Christianity of the evil, imply that Christians are, nevertheless, in danger of falling into it.

Nor is this spirit confined in its operation towards the *irreligious*: among Christians themselves, in their behaviour towards one another, it too often intrudes itself. The parent and the children, the master and the servant, the magistrate and the subject, being all on an equal footing in the house of God, there is danger of the latter forgetting the inequality when out of it, and disregarding that order and subordination which is essential to the well-being of society. If we indulge in high-mindedness, it will be natural to dwell in our thoughts upon that relation wherein we stand upon even ground with another, rather than upon that wherein we are beneath him; and thus a parent, a master, or a magistrate, will not be honoured by us in these relations, on account of his being a fellow-christian. If nothing like this had existed in the times of the apostles, it is not likely we should have had the ex-

hortation in 1 Tim. vi. 1, 2. *Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of all honour; that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren: but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.*

To the above may be added, *privileges and advantages, which, though of a worldly nature, are accidentally attached to religion.* The circumstance of being of a party, or denomination, which has the sanction of authority, or the greatest numbers, or people of the greatest opulence and respectability, belonging to it, is frequently known to furnish occasion to spiritual pride. What airs have some men assumed on account of their religion happening to to be established by law, and what an outcry have they made against schism, as though the true church and the true religion were to be known by human legislation; not considering that the same legislature establishes different forms of religion in different parts of the empire; and that Episcopalians, therefore, are no less schismatical in Scotland, than Presbyterians and other Dissenters in England. What airs also have some men assumed among Dissenters, on account of their denomination, or the congregation where they have attended, being distinguished for its opulence; as if, since the times of our Saviour and his apostles, things were turned upside down, and that which was then a matter of no account was now become all in all.

Even where persons are of the same denomination, the mere circumstance of a *regular and strict adherence to its rules*, though of little or no importance, becomes the occasion of a sort of spiritual pride. We have heard much of the *regular* Clergy, and of the regular Dissenters too, who each value themselves, and despise others whom they consider as irregular, though, in many instances, they be men whose worth is superior to their own.

Nor is this spirit apparent on one side only. If some are lifted up by being of that party which has the greatest number, others are no less so in being of that which has the smallest. To despise the multitude, and to picque themselves on being among *the discerning few*, is common with men who have nothing better on

which to ground their self-esteem. Pride will also find footing to support it in being *irregular*, as well as regular. The contempt with which some affect to treat all forms and rules, and those who adhere to them, is far from being to their honour, and bears too near a resemblance to the spirit of Diogenes, who trampled upon the pride of Plato, and that, as Plato told him, *with greater pride.*

SECTION II.

THE CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL PRIDE.

The operations of this principle may not only be traced by those things which furnish occasion for it, but by other things which have a *direct and positive influence in producing it.* The *occasion* and the *cause* must not be confounded. The one is the object upon which pride fastens, and which it perverts to its use; the other is the principle by which it is produced. The Apostle himself was in danger of being *exhalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations that were given him:* not that those revelations tended in their own nature to produce this effect; but, like all other good things, were capable of being abused through the remains of indwelling sin. To be the occasion of spiritual pride reflects no dishonour: but that which in its own nature causes it, must needs be false and pernicious. The principal sources of this overwhelming stream will be found among the dark mountains of error and delusion.

It may not be in our power to determine, with certainty, whether the spiritual pride which we see in others *originates* in their religion, or operates *notwithstanding* it: but if we be only able to show that the former *may possibly be the case*, we shall at least furnish grounds for self-examination; and if withal it can be proved, that certain notions have a natural tendency to produce that very effect, which is manifest in the spirit of those who avow them, we shall thereby be able to judge, with some degree of satisfaction, what is true and false religion? That which worketh lowliness of mind is from above; but that which produceth self-complacency is assuredly from beneath.

It requires also to be noticed, that these things may prevail in *different degrees*. The religion of some is *wholly false;* and spiritual pride compasseth them as doth a chain: that of others is *partly* so; and they are greatly affected by it: but the tendency is the same in both.

Once more: It requires to be noticed, that the prevalence of true or false religion in individuals cannot be ascertained with certainty by the truth or falsehood of their *professed creed.* This may be true, and we, notwithstanding, be essentially erroneous; or, on the other hand, it may include much error, and yet the principles which really govern our spirit and conduct may be so different, that the truth may nevertheless be said to dwell in us. Such cases may, however, be considered as rare—a kind of exception from a general rule.

It is a general truth, manifestly taught in the scriptures, that spiritual pride is fed by false religion. All the false teachers of whom they give an account were distinguished by this spirit. *They loved to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they might be seen of men.—They loved the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.—There was a certain man called Simon, who beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one.—I will come unto you shortly, and not know the speech of them that are puffed up: but the power:—for ye suffer if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exhalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.—Let us not be desirous of vain-glory: if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing he deceiveth himself.—As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, constrain you to be circumcised.—Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.—Let no man beguile you of your reward of a voluntary humility, and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.—Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of*

dignities.—When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure, through the lusts of the flesh, those that were clear escaped from them who live in error.—Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, receiveth us not.

It should seem, from hence, that though all spiritual pride does not arise from false religion, yet all false religion, produces spiritual pride. The best of men, and those who adhere to the best of principles, are in danger of this sin ; but as there is a wide and manifest difference between sinning and living in sin, so it is one thing to be occasionally lifted up, and that at a time when the great principles we imbibe are in a manner out of sight, and another to be habitually intoxicated with self-complacency, and that as the immediate *effect* of our religion. See you a man whose meditation, preaching, or writing, produces *humble charity, a pure heart, a good conscience*, and you may expect to find in him *faith unfeigned.* But if you perceive in him a fondness for unprofitable themes of discourse, which *minister questions rather than godly edifying* which is in faith, with a forwardness to *affirm what he does not understand*, you may be almost certain that he has *swerved from the truth*, and turned aside to vain jangling.

As true religion principally consists in *the knowledge of the true God*, and *of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*, or in just sentiments of the *Lawgiver* and the *Saviour* of men : so almost every species of error will be found in the contrary. If we err in our conceptions of the divine character it resembles an error at the outset of a journey ; the consequence of which is, that the farther we travel, the farther we are off. Without a proper sense of the holy excellence of the divine nature it will be impossible to perceive *the fitness of the law*, which requires us to love him with all our heart. Such a requirement must appear rigorous and cruel. Hence, we shall be disposed either to contract it, and imagine that our Creator cannot now expect any thing more at our hands than an outward decency of conduct ; or, if we admit that perfect love is required, we shall still perceive no equity in it, and feel no manner of obligation to comply with it. The law will be accounted a task-master, and the gospel praised at its expense. In both cases we shall be blinded

to the *multitude and magnitude of our sins*; for, as where no law is there is no transgression, so in proportion as we are insensible of the spirituality or equity of it, we must needs be insensible of the evil of having transgressed it. And thus it is that men are whole in their own esteem, and think they need no physician, or one of but little value. Thus it is, that degrading notions are entertained of the Saviour, and diminutive representations given of his salvation. In short, thus it is, that justification by free grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, either becomes inadmissible, or, if admitted in words, is considered as a victory over the law, and as exonerating from all obligations to obey its precepts. Here, or hereabouts, will be found the grand springs of spiritual pride.

It is difficult to conceive whence the notion of *sinless perfection* in the present life, and all the spiritual pride that attaches to it, could arise, unless it was from ignorance of the glorious holiness of God, the spirituality of his law, and the corruption of the human heart. A proper sense of these truths would impel the best character upon earth to exclaim, with the Prophet, *Wo is me, I am a man of unclean lips!*

And how is it that an obligation to love the Lord supremely, and with all our hearts, should be so hard to be understood? Yet few think themselves obliged to love him. 'We are *sinners*,' say they, 'and *cannot* love him! and if we now and then yield him a little formal service, though it be by putting a force upon our inclinations, we imagine we do great things, nearly as much as ought to be required of us, and much more than many do, whom we could name!'

Thus the sin of not loving God from our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves, is made nothing of in the world, though it be the fountain and sum of evil. The conscience itself is so defiled, that if we manifest but a decent behaviour in our relations among men, it very nearly acquits us. We claim a kind of exemption from every thing else. And, whether it be by the dint of repetition with which this claim has been preferred, or whether those who ought to resist it be themselves too much inclined to favour it, so it is, that too many

ministers give it up, contenting themselves with exhorting their hearers to things with which they *can* comply consistently with reigning enmity to God in their hearts; to things which contain nothing truly good in them, and which a sinner may therefore perform through his whole life, and be shut out of heaven at last as *a worker of iniquity*. There is not a precept in the Bible that can be obeyed without love, or with which a man may comply and be lost for ever: to exhort sinners, therefore to things which merely qualify them for this world, or even to reading, hearing, or praying, in such a manner as cannot please God, is deviating from the scriptures, and yielding up the first principles of moral government to the inclinations of depraved creatures. In short, it is no better than to enforce the *tithing of mint and cummin, to the neglect of judgment, mercy, and the love of God.*

On this sandy foundation rests the whole fabric of *self-righteous hope*, and all the spiritual pride which attaches to it. So long as we are blinded to the spirituality and requirements of the divine law, we are in effect *without the law* and *alive* in our conceit: and while this is the case, we shall see no necessity for salvation by free grace through a mediator, nor any fitness in it. Seeking to be justified, as it were, by the works of the law, we shall continue to stumble at the stumbling-stone. But when the *commandment*, in its true extent, comes home to the conscience, we find ourselves the subjects of abundance of sin, of which we never before suspected ourselves; and not till then, we *die*, or despair of acceptance with God by the works of our hands.

We are clearly and expressly taught what that doctrine is which excludes boasting; and, by consequence, what it is that nourishes and cherishes it. *Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath sent forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God: to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.* WHERE IS BOASTING THEN? *It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith—Not of works, lest any*

man should boast. But if, in direct opposition to this, men be taught, and induced to believe, that Christ came into the world only to give us good instruction, and set us a good example: that there is no need of any atonement, for that "Repentance and a good life are of themselves sufficient to recommend us to the divine favour;" and that "all hopes founded upon any thing else than a good moral life are merely imaginary;" Where is boasting now? Is it excluded?

Moreover, Though the divinity and atonement of Christ be allowed: yet if men be taught and induced to believe, that the grand object obtained by his death, is that *repentance, faith, and sincere obedience should be accepted as the ground of justification, instead of sinless perfection*, the effect will not be materially different.* On this principle, the gospel is as as really a covenant of works as the law, only that its terms are supposed to be somewhat easier. Nor is boasting excluded by it. The ground of acceptance with God, be it what it may, must be that which is made our *plea* for mercy. If faith, *considered as a virtue*, be that ground, we may then plead it before God, as *that for the sake of which* we hope to be saved; and if this be not boasting, nothing is. This, I am persuaded, no real Christian ever did, or dares attempt. Many good men, I doubt not, have been entangled with these disputes in

* This seems to have been the idea of Bishop Butler. "The doctrine of the gospel," he says, appears to be, not only that he [Christ] taught the efficacy of repentance; but rendered it of the efficacy which it is, by what he did and suffered for us; that he obtained for us the benefit of having our repentance accepted unto eternal life: not only that he revealed to sinners that they were in a capacity of salvation, and how they might obtain it; but moreover, that he put them into this capacity of salvation, by what he did and suffered for them; put us into a capacity of escaping future punishment, and obtaining future happiness." See his Analogy, *Part* II. Chap. V. p. 305.

[I heard Mr. Venn, of Yelling, give an account, however, to Mr. Berridge, of Bishop Butler's death, who related his conversation with one of his chaplains, to whom the Bishop remarked, 'That it was an awful thing to appear before the Moral Governor of the world;' when the chaplain, whose views were more clearly evangelical, referred him to the obedience of Christ, by which many are made righteous: when the dying Bishop exclaimed, 'O this is comfortable!' and so expired. R.]

theory: but when upon their knees, it is *in the name of Jesus* that their petitions for mercy are presented, *and for his sake only* that they hope for their sins to be forgiven them. Faith, in the one case, is paying a composition, and all that in such circumstances ought to be required: but faith, in the other [case,] is acquiescing in the bestowment of mercy as a free and undeserved favour; not as the reward of any thing good in us, but of the obedience and death of the Saviour. The intercession of Christ, in the first instance, would be an apology for the well disposed, resembling that which he offered for Mary of Bethany—*They have done what they could:* but in the last, it is what the scripture denominates it, an intercession for *transgressors*. Here the divine government is justified, the conduct of sinners condemned, and the all prevailing worthiness of the intercessor alleged, as the only ground, or reason, for the sake of which mercy should be bestowed. Thus it is, that while officiating as the advocate of *sinners*, he sustains the character of *Jesus Christ the righteous*. Finally: Influenced by the first of these statements, I feel myself on respectable terms with my Creator; though not sinless, yet entitled to mercy, as doing my best: influenced by the last, I approach my Creator as *a sinner ready to perish;* without a single plea for mercy, but what arises from his own gracious nature, operating through the atonement of his Son. And through my whole life, whatever be my repentance, my faith, or the sincerity of my obedience, I never ground a single plea on any of these things, as a procuring cause of mercy but invariably desire that I may be *found in him.*

There is another species of spiritual pride, very different from any thing which has yet been described, and which originates in what some would call *the extremes of orthodoxy;* but which might with greater propriety, be termed, *gross heterodoxy*, or *false notions of the doctrines of grace.*

I have said it arises from *false views of the doctrines of grace;* and this I am persuaded is the case, even where the most orthodox language is retained. The same terms may be used by different persons, to express very different ideas. Thus it is that the doctrines of election, the atonement, justification by imputed

righteousness, efficacious grace, and perseverance in a life of faith, are held fast in words, but in fact perverted.

[For the remainder of what was written of this Essay on Spiritual Pride, the reader is referred to the Essay on Antinomianism, Introduction and Part II.]

THE AWAKENED SINNER:

A CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ARCHIPPUS, A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, AND EPAPHRAS, A YOUNG MAN WHO HAD BEEN ONE OF HIS HEARERS.

And he brought them out, and said, Sirs, What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, Acts xvi. 30, 31.

LETTER I.

[Epaphras to Archippus.]

My Dear Sir,

For several years past, you know, I have sat under your ministry. Having lately been removed, by providence, beyond the reach of it, many things, which made but little impression upon my mind at the time, have been called to remembrance. My heart often sinks at the thought of the non-improvement of my former mercies; and trembles lest those solemn warnings and tender expostulations which I have heard from you, should on a future day, bear witness against me.

You have more than once talked to me on the concerns of my soul; but I could never be free to answer you. Indeed I did not like to hear of the subject. It always struck a damp upon my spirits, and rendered your company, which otherwise was very agreeable, a burden. But now, seldom seeing your face, I feel a

wish to open my mind to you ; and the rather because the salvation of my soul has of late concerned me more than at any former period.

Though you are well acquainted with my person, you knew but little of my character, or of the things which were at work in my mind. I have been guilty of many evils from my youth. I have also been the subject of occasional convictions ; and strange thoughts have passed my mind concerning religion. When about twelve years of age, the death of several persons around me impressed my mind with solemn reflections about my own future state. I conceived of God as an almighty being ; but had no just ideas of his moral character. It appeared to me, that being stronger than we, his will must be our law. I saw no justice or fitness in its being so; but as we were unable to dispute with him, it must be so. I entertained many hard thoughts of his government, on the ground of our first parent being constituted the head of his posterity, and of the consequence of his sin as affecting us. Sometimes I wished I had never been born: but then again it would recur to me, born I am, and die I must, and after death is a judgment! At other times, my thoughts would turn to the only hope set before us, the salvation of Jesus Christ. I conceived of him, however, as coming into the world, not to satisfy the injured justice of God, but to make us amends for the injury we had received from Adam's transgression, and to give us as it were, another chance for our life. I thought God must know that he had dealt hardly with us ; and therefore, was constrained by equity to do as he did, in giving his Son to die for us: and that, if he had not done this, we should have had just cause for complaint, whatever we might have as it was.

I read in the scriptures of the necessity of repentance and conversion ; and many thoughts passed through my mind on this subject; but I generally postponed a serious attention to it to some future day. I formed resolutions of amendment, and fixed times when I would return to God by repentance ; but, as the former seldom proved to be of any account in the hour of temptation, so the latter passed over, and left me where I was. About this time I fell into company, which often drew me into a breach of the sab-

bath. During the summer season we used to walk the fields, to the neglect of public worship. I could not do this, however, without its being followed by keen remorse. Such was the bitterness of my soul on one of these occasions, that I invoked the curse of the Almighty upon myself, and wrote it upon the walls of a building near the outside of the town, if I passed that building any more on the sabbath day to the neglect of his worship.

I now began to think myself a little better; but still suspected I was not right at heart. The words of Christ to Nicodemus would in a manner strike me dead, *Ye must be born again!* The ideas which I formed of the new birth, as nearly as I can remember, were, that I must be in some very deep distress, next to despair; and in that state of mind a voice from heaven, or something like it, was to set me at liberty. I used to go alone into the fields in an evening, and there weep over my condition, and pray that I might be converted: but it always seemed to me that God would not hear me. At length, I began to despair. I thought I never should be converted, and so must perish for ever. Sometimes I thought of giving up all concern about it, and enjoying the pleasures of life while I could; but as I knew not how to shake off my uneasiness, I thought I would try *another year*, and wait and pray . . . peradventure by that I might be converted.

During this year I was often beset with thoughts like these—'Perhaps, after all, there is nothing in religion; perhaps the Bible is nothing more than the invention of some great man, to keep the world in order; perhaps the Mahomedans have as good ground to believe in the Alcoran, as we have in the scriptures; perhaps there is no hereafter; perhaps there is no God.' My heart, I believe, would willingly have received these principles, shocking as they are; but my conscience would not suffer me to do it. I even took pains to convince myself of their falsehood, by walking out into the fields on a starlight evening, viewing the heavens, and inferring from thence the being of a God; which when admitted, the reality of religion followed as a necessary consequence.

About this time I read *Alleine's Alarm to the Unconverted.* He said, "There were some who thought themselves converted, but were not so; and others, who thought they were not converted,

but were so. I overlooked the alarming part of the treatise, and caught hold of this, gathering from it some sort of hope that the latter might possibly be my case. My year was now expired; and though I had a few hopes, I felt no ground for any satisfactory conclusion. I thought I must be better than I was: yet how to make myself so, I knew not.

But my sheet is full: I therefore, at present subscribe myself,

Yours, with much respect,

EPAPHRAS.

LETTER II.

[Epaphras to Archippus.]

My dear Sir,

Let me presume upon your patience, while I resume the narrative of my past exercises of mind. When about fourteen years of age, I remember, as I was one morning musing by myself, and thinking of the number and magnitude of my offences, the bitter pangs of despair seized me. *Iniquity*, said I, *will be my ruin!* A sigh, as from the bottom of my heart, succeeded this exclamation. But, all on a sudden, I seemed to hear as it were a voice from heaven, saying to me, *Sin shall not have dominion over thee; for thou art not under the law, but under grace.* I instantly burst into a flood of tears, and went on weeping for joy, till my weeping powers seemed to be exhausted. In reflecting upon this, I thought, 'I am now surely converted: this must be the new birth.' I was the subject of transporting joy, and confidence of having found the pearl of price.

From what I have heard you say concerning impressions, even in scripture language, where it is not the truth contained in the words, but the idea of their being an extraordinary revelation from heaven made to the soul of the forgiveness of its sins, I have no reason to suppose that your thoughts of this singular part of my experience will accord with what at that time were mine. Indeed, from what followed, I have no reason to think favourably of it myself, for within a few hours all was forgotten, as though it had not been; and what is worse, I returned to my sins as eagerly as ever, and lived several years after this in the unbridled indulgence of almost every species of iniquity that came within my reach. It is

true, I could not sin without occasional pangs of remorse, and such as were very bitter ; but my heart was set on evil. I formed intimacies with dissolute young people, and did as they did. I drew many into my wicked courses, as others had drawn me into theirs ; and having never made any profession of religion, I felt the less concern. I seemed to consider religion as a kind of discretional service. Those who made profession of it, I thought were obliged to act accordingly ; but others, except so far as they might be induced to attend to it for their own safety, were at liberty to give scope to their inclinations.

My heart was so hardened by repeated acts of sin, that God was scarcely in any of my thoughts. His all-piercing eye did not restrain me. There was a poor godly man, however, one of my father's labourers, whose eye and ear used to strike me with terror. If at any time I had been reading, or had gone a few miles to hear a sermon, or any thing else that looked like religion, I used to imagine that he looked upon me with complacency and hope : but when I had been indulging in sin, I thought I saw in his face the very frowns of heaven. It was a strange and singular regard that I felt for this poor man. His good opinion was what I desired above that of all other persons. When he has been going to worship on a Lord's-day morning, I have run with eagerness to overtake him ; yet when in his company, I had nothing to say. If ever I wished for riches, it was that I might be able to confer them upon him

Within the last year, my concern has been renewed. Having been deeply engaged in a very ungodly piece of conduct, which was publicly known, I dreaded nothing so much as meeting the eyes of this poor man. He, however, said nothing to me ; and I suppose thought no more of it than he would of seeing evil fruit growing upon an evil tree : but my mind from that time became habitually wretched. Like Sampson, I strove to shake myself, and to do as at other times ; but my strength was gone : the joy of my heart was fled. From this time, many of my open vices were relinquished : the love of sin, however, was not subdued. On the contrary, in proportion to the restraints under which my convictions laid me as to some evils, such was the strength of my inclin-

ations towards others. For two or three months together, it was common for me to indulge in sin in an evening; and when I waked in the morning to be overwhelmed with guilt and horror. In the hour of dejection, I would resolve against future compliances. In some few instances I kept to my resolutions; and when I did so I had peace; as also when at any time I had wept over my sin, and bemoaned my miserable condition, I enjoyed a kind of secret satisfaction: but when my resolutions failed me, as they mostly did in the hour of temptation, all my peace and comfort would forsake me. I have learned by these things, that there is no help in me; and that, if God were to forgive me all that is past, I should in one hour destroy my soul.

Formerly I used to sin away my convictions; but have not been able to do so of late. Conscience has seemed to follow me wherever I have gone, or rather, like an angel of God with a drawn sword in his hand, to meet me in my wicked courses. Indeed, I am now afraid of losing my convictions, knowing that eternal ruin must be the consequence in that case, whatever it be as it is.

O Sir! I am a miserable sinner. My crimes have been much more numerous and aggravated than you, or any of my friends can have imagined. I have long known myself to be a sinner; but now I feel it. I often repeat to myself the lamentations of a sinner, as described by Mr. Mason—

"I have been Satan's willing slave,
And his most easy prey;
He was not readier to command
Than I was to obey.
If any time he left my soul,
Yet still his work went on;
I've been a tempter to myself:
Ah, Lord, what have I done!"

I sometimes think I feel the wrath of God, as an earnest of hell, kindled already in my bosom. My former hopes, instead of affording me any encouragement, work despair. It seems to me presumptuous, after so many base and repeated relapses, to hope for mercy. When I look into the scriptures, I see, as I have long seen, that except I repent, and believe in Christ, I must inevitably perish: but alas, loaded as I am with sorrow, my heart is too

hard to repent ; and as to faith, and the prayer of faith, they are things foreign from the state of my mind. I would give the world, if I had it, to be possessed of them : but O, I cannot, I dare not believe ; I am unworthy of mercy. I fear I am a reprobate, of whom God hath determined to make an example, and therefore that there is no hope for me. My heart has often revolted at that awful doctrine ; and now it overwhelms me. I know you will feel for me : but whether any relief can be afforded to a soul like mine, I know not. Let me conjure you, however, to be plain with me, and tell me, without reserve, what you think of my case ; and if you have any counsel to offer, let me intreat you to impart it.

I am, with unfeigned respect,
Yours, &c.
EPAPHRAS.

LETTER III.

[Archippus to Epaphras.]

My dear young Friend,

The narration with which you have favoured me has deeply interested my feelings on your behalf. My desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may be saved. In the early workings of your mind, I see much of the enmity and error of the human heart. Your thoughts of God and his government, Christ and his gospel, and of the nature of conversion, are the thoughts of many much older than you: but they are not the better on this account. These are among the *imaginations and high thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God*, and require to be *cast down, and every thought to be brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ.*

Your temptations to disbelieve the Bible, and even the being of God, were no more than the ordinary operations of a depraved heart, disturbed by the light of the gospel having made its way into the conscience. Your vows and endeavours to repent and be converted appear to have arisen from a mixture of slavish fear and self-righteous hope. You was not sorry for your sin, nor wished to be sorry, from any dislike you bore to it; but you tremble at the wrath to come, and wished to become any thing that you might escape it; and, not knowing the deceitfulness of your own heart, you flattered yourself that by putting on a good resolution you could bend it into a compliance with the will of God.

I need not say much concerning the *impression* by which your mind was filled with joy. You yourself seem sufficiently convinced, by what followed, that it was not conversion, but a blossom

without fruit. Those who conclude, from such feelings, that they are in a state of salvation, are objects of pity.

Concerning your late and present distress, I feel much for you; not only in a way of sympathy, but of concern for the *issue;* for many persons have been as deeply distressed about their salvation as you appear to be, who have yet taken up their rest in something short of Christ; which is a much more dangerous state than that from which they were first awakened, and, if persisted in, will render their case less tolerable than if they had lived and died in ignorance.

Your sins, you say, "are much more numerous and aggravated than I or any of your friends can have imagined." Doubtless you have been guilty of things which neither I nor any other creature can have been privy to: but I apprehend that, at present, you have but a very imperfect sense of them. So far from thinking that you view the evil of your way in too strong a light, I am persuaded you are a *thousand* times more wicked in the sight of God, whose judgment is according to truth, than ever you have yet been in your own sight: your heart condemns you; but God is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things!

I write not thus to drive you to despair; for though your sins were ten times more numerous and more aggravated than they are, while the good news of eternal life, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, is held up to you, there is no reason for this. You have learned, you think, "that there is no help *in* you." Be it so, it does not follow that there is none without you On the contrary, it is by a thorough and practical knowledge of the one, that the other becomes acceptable. If the help that is provided without, therefore, give you no relief, I am constrained to think it is because you are not yet brought to despair of help from within.

Let me speak freely to you of *the gospel of Jesus Christ.* You may think this to contain no *news* to you: but I am persuaded that hitherto you have neither understood nor believed it. Your despair is like that of a man who gives himself up for lost, without having tried the only remedy. You have prayed for mercy, but *hitherto you have asked nothing with a pure respect to the atone-*

ment of Jesus. Ask in his name, and you shall receive and your joy shall be full.

Consider well the following passages of scripture, as expressing the sum of the glorious gospel of the blessed God : *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotton Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.—I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein ye stand, unless ye have believed in vain—how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures ; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures.—The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom : but we preach Christ crucified.—I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.—God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech men by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. —By him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.—Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.—Him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out.*

This, my dear friend, was the all-efficacious doctrine by which the pressure of guilt was removed from thousands in the times of the apostles, and has been removed from millions in succeeding ages. When a perishing sinner inquired, *What must I do to be saved ?* the answer was at hand, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* This was the plenteous *redemption* which even Old-testament sinners embraced by faith. These were the water, the wine, and the milk, which they were freely invited to buy, without money, and without price. This is the wedding supper, which the Lord hath prepared, and concerning which he hath declared, *All things are ready ; come ye to the marriage.*

But you will say, I have read and considered and believed all this long ago; and yet I am not relieved. I remember Saul, on a certain occasion, said to Samuel, *I have performed the commandment of the Lord:* but Samuel answered, *What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears; and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?* That you have read these things, and thought of them, may be admitted; but if you have believed them with all your heart, how is it that I hear of peace and satisfaction arising from tears, and moans, and a compliance with resolutions? How is it that the magnitude of guilt, instead of leading you to confess it upon the head of the gospel sacrifice, and to sue for *mercy* wholly in his name, should induce you to despair? How is it that your being *unworthy* of mercy is made an objection to believing? Indeed, my young friend, these are but too manifest indications that hitherto you have been going about to establish your own righteousness, and have not *submitted to the righteousness of God*; a course which, if not relinquished, will ruin your soul. The overthrow of the Jews, in the times of our Saviour and his apostles, was owing to this. They were anxiously concerned about religion; they *followed after the law of righteousness*; yet they attained it not: and wherefore? *Because they sought it not by faith; but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone!* It is not the magnitude of your sins that will prove a bar to your salvation: if there be any bar, it will be your unbelief. *If thou canst believe—all things are possible to him that believeth!*

I am apprehensive that you have never yet cordially admitted the humbling import of the gospel. It is not your believing, from the tradition of your fathers, that there was a person called Jesus Christ, who came into the world about eighteen hundred years ago, and who is, in some way or other, the Saviour of sinners. The gospel is a divine system; the wisdom of God in a mystery. It implies a number of important truths, to which the corrupt heart of man is naturally averse; and cannot properly be said to be believed, while they are rejected or overlooked. Such are the equity and glory of the divine law, and the guilty, lost, and perishing condition of those who have transgressed it. More particular-

ly, that God is worthy of being loved with all the heart, however depraved that heart may be ; that our transgressions against him have been *without cause ;* that we are justly deserving of his eternal displeasure ; that there is no help in us, or hope of recovery by our own efforts ; finally, that we are utterly unworthy of mercy, and must be saved, if at all, by mere grace. These truths are plainly *implied* in the doctrine of *atonement*, and of a *free* salvation; and without admitting them it is impossible we should admit the other. While we conceive of ourselves as injured creatures, and of the gift of Christ, and salvation by him, as a recompence for the injury, it is no wonder we should imagine it to be confined to the comparatively worthy, or at least criminal, and so begin to despair as we perceive the magnitude of our guilt. Or if in words we disavow all merit, and confess ourselves to be in a helpless and hopeless condition ; yet we shall view it as our misfortune rather, than our sin, and ourselves as more deserving of pity than punishment. And while this is the case, our supposed love to the Saviour is certain to operate at the expense of the Lawgiver.

You acknowledge that, in your earlier years, such notions possessed your mind. Let me intreat you to consider whether they have not still a place in you, and whether your present unhappy state of mind be not chiefly to be ascribed to them. If you do not admit what the gospel necessarily implies, and that in a practical way, so as to act upon it, how can you admit the thing itself? There is no grace in Christ's laying down his life for us, and bestowing salvation upon us, but upon the supposition of the justice of the divine government, and therefore we cannot perceive any ; for it is impossible to see that which is not to be seen. But if you perceive the rectitude of the divine character and government, and feel yourself to be a justly condemned sinner, without help, or hope, or a single plea to offer in arrest of judgment, the gospel will appear in its glory, and all its blessings will be welcome to your heart. Thus *knowing the only living and true God*, you will *know Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent ; hearing and learning of the Father, you will come to the Son :* and thus, after every self-righteous effort has been tried in vain, you will, ere you are aware, *repent*

and believe the gospel. Then you will no longer conceive of God as a being who avails himself of his almighty power to awe you into silence ; but as one who has righteousness on his side, on account of which *every mouth will be stopped, and all the world be guilty before him.* Then, instead of being overwhelmed, and driven to despair by the doctrine of election, it will appear not only equitable, but the only source of hope. You will perceive that what would have been just towards all mankind, cannot be unjust towards a part of them : and feeling yourself divested of all claim, unless it be to shame and confusion of face, you will throw yourself at the feet of sovereign mercy. I do not say you will be *willing to be saved or lost, as it shall please God.* Some worthy men have worked themselves and others into a persuasion that they were the subjects of such resignation : but resignation of this kind is not required at our hands ; as it would be inconsistent with that importunity for the blessing with which we are encouraged to besiege the throne of grace ; and even with love to God itself, which cannot possibly be reconciled to be everlastingly banished from him, and to live in enmity against him. But this I say, you will feel and acknowledge that God might justly cast you off for ever ; and that if he accept and save you, it must be purely of undeserved mercy.

You say you *dare not believe.* If you mean that you dare not entertain the persuasion of your being saved in your present condition, that may be very proper : but has God any where revealed that you shall ? If not, such a persuasion would not be faith, but presumption. That faith which has the promise of eternal life has revealed truth, and particularly the gospel of salvation by Jesus Christ, for its object. And dare you not believe this ? Rather, how dare you disbelieve it ? How will you escape if you neglect so great salvation ? Is it presumption to take God at his word ? Is it presumption to renounce your own righteousness, and submit to the righteousness of God ? Is it presumption to believe that Christ is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him ? Rather, is it not the greatest of all sins to question these truths, after all that God has said in confirmation of them ?

But you will answer, That at which I hesitate is embracing the *promises, with application to myself.* You are not required or allowed to take the promises in any other than their *true meaning.* So far as that meaning includes *your case*, so far you are warranted to apply them to it, and no farther. For example: if *you* return to the Lord, you have a right to conclude that *you,* as readily as any sinner in the world, shall receive abundant pardon; if *you* come to Jesus, *you* shall in no wise be cast out; but neither these promises, nor any other, hold up any assurance of salvation to the impenitent and unbelieving. First believe the promises to be what they profess to be, true, great, and precious, to the renouncing of every other foundation of hope; and then the consciousness of this will afford a ground of persuasion that the blessings contained in them are your own.

But you add, you *cannot* repent, and *cannot* believe. Consider, I beseech you, what it is that hindereth; and whether it be any thing else than the latent enmity of your heart to God. If you loved him, surely you could repent; nay, surely you could not but repent, and mourn for all your transgressions against him: surely you could not be insensible to the glory of Christ, and the way of salvation by him. You love yourself, and can mourn on your own account: but for all that you have done against him you *cannot* be grieved! You love yourself, and would give the world, if you had it, to escape the wrath to come: but, for all that the Saviour has done and suffered, you can perceive no loveliness in him! You can see no glory in being pardoned for the sake of his atonement; no comeliness in him, nor beauty, that you should desire him! Do I misrepresent the case? Let conscience answer.

O, my dear young friend, do not cover your sin, nor flatter yourself that the bar to your salvation does not lie in your own heart. With the secret purposes of God you have nothing to do, as a rule of conduct: the things that are revealed belong to you; and these are, that you should repent of your sins, and believe in Christ alone for salvation. If you be not found an unbeliever, you need not fear being found a reprobate.

I am,

Yours, with much affection.

ARCHIPPUS.

LETTER IV.

[Archippus to Epaphras.]

My dear Friend,

Several months have elapsed since I wrote to you, and I have received no answer. Am I to interpret your long silence as an intimation that you do not wish for any further correspondence with me, on the important subject of your last? If I felt no concern for your eternal welfare, I might not only so consider it, but remain as silent on my part as you do on yours. But I must write, at least this once. When I think of your situation, I feel somewhat as the Apostle did towards the Galatians—a *travailing in birth, that Christ may be formed in you.*

In looking over the copy of my last, I acknowledge I have felt some misgivings of heart. I am sometimes ready to ask, May it not appear to him as though I was unfeeling? Though what I wrote was according to the best of my judgment, the truth of God; yet was there not too much use of the probe for a single letter? Might I not have dwelt less on the searching, and more on the consolatory? Yet, after all, I am not sure that I ought. But, as the Apostle, after addressing a searching epistle to the Corinthians, had many conflicts in his own mind concerning the issue, and at times half repented, so it was with me. Yet what counsel or direction have I to offer, which has not already been offered? If the free grace of the gospel, or the all-sufficient redemption of Jesus Christ would comfort you, I could joyfully enlarge upon them. The provisions of mercy are free and ample. *All things are ready*: millions of sinners have already come to the marriage, *and yet there is room.* If there were only a *peradventure* that you should be accepted, that were sufficient to warrant an application. Thus

the lepers reasoned in their perishing condition : *Why sit we here until we die? If we say we will enter into the city, the famine is there; and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore, come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us we can but die.* Thus also reasoned Esther: *I will go in unto the king, which is not according to law; and if I perish I perish!* But in applying to the Saviour of sinners, there are no such peradventures. To cut off every objection, he has proclaimed with his own lips, *Ho every one that thirsteth, let him come unto me and drink! Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest! Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for* EVERY ONE THAT ASKETH RECEIVETH ; AND HE THAT SEEKETH FINDETH ; AND TO HIM THAT KNOCKETH IT SHALL BE OPENED !

But to all this you repulsively answer, 'I *cannot* repent, I *cannot* believe.' What then can I do? If the doctrine of the cross contain no charms which can attract you, it is not for me to coin another gospel, nor to bend the scriptures to the inclination of man's depraved heart. We must bend to them, and not they to us : or if not, they will be found to be true, to our confusion.

I am aware that persons in your condition desire above all things to be soothed and comforted by something else than the gospel. They imagine themselves to be willing to be saved in God's way ; as willing as the impotent man that waited at the pool was to be made whole ; therefore they wish to be directed to wait and hope *in the way that they are in*, till it shall please God to release them, as by the moving of the waters. It is also grateful to them to be encouraged, on the ground of their *present distress*, to hope that God has mercy in reserve for them , for that it is his usual way, first to convince of sin, and afterwards to impart the joys of salvation. A company of gentlemen, (on board a ship that touched at one of the southernmost parts of South America,) had a mind to make a short botanical excursion. They accordingly ascended one of the mountains. Ere they were aware, night came on, and a very cold fog. They felt an unusual propensity to sleep : but a medical friend, who was with them, strongly remonstrated against every indulgence of the kind, as they would be in the utmost dan-

ger of never waking again. What would you have thought of this gentleman's conduct, if, instead of urging his companions to escape from the mountain, he had indulged them in their wishes! The scriptures declare, *he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him;* and surely we ought not to contradict this declaration, either by directing to the use of means short of believing, or encouraging those who use them to hope for a happy issue. The crucifiers of Christ were in great distress; but Peter did not encourage them to take comfort from this, but directed them to repent and be converted—to repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins. The Philippian jailor was in great distress; but Paul had no comfort for him on this ground, nor any counsel to offer but believing in Jesus.

A necessity is laid upon me, and woe is me if I preach not the gospel! I have not deviated from this point in what I have hitherto written; nor will I deviate, whatever be the consequence. Wherefore? Because I love you not? God knoweth! I am determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified! If this doctrine fail to relieve you, the cause must be looked for, not in the want of encouragement, but of desire to embrace it. But, O my dear young man! consider Jesus Christ, the Apostle and High Priest of our profession! As one that has tasted that the Lord is gracious, though a perishing sinner like yourself, I do most heartily recommend him to you. I was brought low, and he helped me! The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord, O Lord I beseech thee, deliver my soul! By happy experience I can bear witness that gracious is the Lord and righteous: yea, our God is merciful. He delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. O taste and see that the Lord is gracious! The eyes of many are upon you: saints and angels stand ready to embrace you as a brother, as soon as you shall embrace their Lord. *The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and he that heareth saith, Come;* and Jesus himself, who testified these things, exalted as he is in the highest heavens, closes the invitation, saying *Whosoever*

will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely. Pore no longer on your misery: look no longer for any worthiness in yourself: but as an unworthy sinner, rely for acceptance with God on the righteousness of Christ alone. This is the good old way in which believers in every age have walked: walk therein, and you shall find rest unto your soul.

I am

Your affectionate Friend,

ARCHIPPUS.

LETTER V.

[Epaphras to Archippus.]

My dear Sir,

My mind has been for some time in so confused and unhappy a state that though I felt my obligations to you, and by no means intended to slight your kindness, yet I knew not how to answer you. I rather felt a wish to be secluded, at least for a time, that I might bemoan my case by myself in secret.

Your first letter, I must say, yielded me no comfort. On the contrary, it wounded me not a little. I confessed to you that I had been a great sinner; you persuaded me that I was much worse than I imagined. I acknowledged the hardness of my heart, and the prevalence of my unbelief; you attributed both to my being destitute of the love of God. I wanted relief, and you cut off every source of consolation, save that which arises from faith in Christ, of which I had told you I felt myself incapable. When I considered my inability to believe, however, I did not mean that I could not believe the gospel; I supposed I could and did believe that: you have shown, however, that in this I was mistaken. My heart, it seems, is that of an infidel! Alas for me! instead of obtaining any relief, such things sink me deeper and deeper into despondence. Your letter seemed to be a kind of message from God; but it was a message of death. After reading it, I felt myself locked up as it were in a dungeon, and loaded with inextricable chains. I could find no words to vent the sorrow of my heart but those of the weeping prophet: *He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places as those that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about that*

I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer! In such a state of mind, you will not wonder that I should have no heart to write.

Since that time, however, I have conversed with different persons, and have heard different ministers; from one of whom especially, I obtained what I could never obtain before—*encouragement*. As you may suppose, it was impossible wholly to conceal my unhappiness of mind from those about me. One day, I fell in company with a gentleman of very respectable appearance. He, observing in my countenance an habitual dejection, and learning, it should seem, by some means, the cause of it, wished to offer me a little advice. I heard what he had to say; but it did me no good. He observed, that there was such a thing as being righteous overmuch; that he did not apprehend I had been a greater sinner than other men: and that, if I were sober, just, and devout, in moderation, all would be well enough at last. I had too much light to be imposed upon by this. I thought I saw plainly, that though he might be a gentleman and a scholar, yet he had not learned to speak a word in season to him that is weary.

After this, I met with a poor man who appeared to be very zealous in religion. On perceiving my unhappiness, he was very desirous that I should go with him to his place of worship. He told me that their minister would pray for me, and give me the best of counsel; and that great numbers of people in my case had, on going to hear him, obtained relief. They had gone, he said, under the most pungent distress, but had come away pardoned, and justified, and full of joy. He moreover cautioned me against the licentious and horrible doctrines of imputed righteousness, invincible grace, and predestination. I heard what he said, and it appeared to me that he was very sincere in his way: but I thought I had long ago experienced what *he* called a being pardoned and justified, namely, a strong impression upon my mind, even in the words of scripture, that I was so, which yet had proved delusive. And as to his warnings, though I had felt many inward struggles against those doctrines, yet I could never persuade myself to think them any other than scriptural. I went, however, two or three times, to hear at the place which he re-

commended: but, though they might be very good people, yet the religion which they taught appeared to me exceedingly superficial and enthusiastic. I saw plainly enough, that almost any kind of unhappiness concerning one's future state would be admitted as godly sorrow; and any sudden impression that should fill the mind with joy, would be deemed the joy of the gospel. My conscience, therefore, would not suffer me, however desirable consolation would have been to me, to take up my rest with them.

One day, I was induced to hear a stranger who preached an occasional sermon near to where I reside. In the course of his sermon, he spake much of the duty and privilege of prayer; and when addressing himself to the unconverted, observed that they had no power of themselves to turn to God through Christ; but they could pray to the Lord for grace to enable them to do it; and if they did so, he would hear them, and grant them the thing they prayed for. At first I catched at this idea, as appearing to exhibit something that was more within my reach than repentance and faith themselves: but when I came to the trial, I found it was only in appearance; for unless I prayed in *faith*, that is, with an eye to the Saviour in all I asked, God would not hear me. But to pray in faith, could not be more within my reach than faith itself. I thought of you at the time; and that this was a kind of language that you would not use on account of its implying that a sinner is not to be exhorted *immediately* to repent and believe in Christ, nor to any thing spiritually good; but merely to what may be done without repentance, and without faith, as the means of obtaining them.

If I understand your sentiments, you would direct an unconverted sinner to pray, and to pray for spiritual blessings, as Peter did the sorcerer; but it must be *with* repentance, and *in the name of Jesus*; that is, it must be the prayer of penitence and faith. I also was conscious to myself that I was equally able to repent and believe in Christ, as I was *sincerely* to pray for grace to enable me to do so; and that if I could once find a heart for the one, I could for the other.

I pass over some other interviews and sermons, and proceed to relate what has been more interesting to my heart than any thing

else. One Lord's-day morning, I was very much dejected, owing to some struggles of mind about embracing the scheme of *universal salvation*. Having read a publication in favor of it, my heart would gladly have acquiesced; but my judgment and conscience would not suffer me. I saw clearly that that doctrine could never be embraced without offering the most indecent violence to the holy scriptures. Indeed, I was conscious that I should never have thought of believing it to be true, if I had not first wished to have it so.

These thoughts, however, sunk me into the deepest despondency, as they seemed to darken a gleam of hope which, though faintly, I cherished. In this dejected state of mind, I went to hear a minister whom I had more than once heard spoken of as singularly evangelical, and his preaching as being much in an experimental strain. I attended both parts of that day, and once or twice more, before I obtained any relief. As he generally addressed himself to believers, and dwelt upon the privileges and blessing to which they are entitled, I did not, at first, feel interested in his discourses. At length, he took his text from Matt. xi. 28. *Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* I was glad to hear the passage named, as I hoped that something might now be said suited to my case. I knew I was weary and heavy laden to a great degree, and rest for my soul was the very thing I wanted. He proposed first to notice, the *characters* addressed; and secondly, *the blessings to which they were invited;* or, as he explained it, which *belonged* to them. Under the first head of discourse he distinguished sinners into *insensible* and *sensible;* and endeavoured to prove that it was the latter only who were here invited to come to Christ. He mentioned several other invitations, as *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price.—If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.—The Spirit and the bride say, Come, —and let him that is athirst come: and whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely.* Each of these passages were explained in the same way, as descriptive of the spiritual thirst of a soul made sensible of its wants.

I was apprehensive, at first, that this distinction would exclude me from having any part or lot in the matter; but when the minister came to explain himself, and to depict the case of the weary and heavy laden, he entered so fully into my experience that all my apprehensions were removed. I was conscious that I was just that poor miserable creature that he described, who had long been seeking rest but could find none. He warned us against making a *righteousness* of our tears and moans, but insisted that they were *evidences* of a work of grace; proving from God's promising to the "poor in spirit," to the "broken hearted," and the like, that there was hope in Israel for such characters; and that these their distresses were sure signs of their future deliverance, for that whom the Lord wounded he healed, and whom he killed he would make alive.

After worship was over, I could not forbear speaking to the minister, and thanking him for his discourse; and, the greater part of the congregation being withdrawn, I opened my mind freely to him, told him how long I had been under distress of mind, and that I could never before obtain relief. A few of his most intimate friends were present, who also heard what I said. They affectionately smiled, and congratulated me on my having been brought under an evangelical ministry, and by means of it found rest unto my soul. Nor did they scruple to say, that the reason why so many of God's dear children were held in bondage for so long a time was, that the pure gospel was withheld from them, and a kind of linsey-woolsey doctrine substituted in its place. I confess my heart had some misgivings at that time, fearing lest I should be cheered by flattering words, instead of the water of life. I told them, that I dare not at present consider myself a converted man; but that I hoped I should be such. They answered me with a smile, intimating that such thoughts were a sign of grace; and that there was no doubt, but that in waiting at the pool of God's ordinances, I should obtain all that peace and joy which my soul desired.

On my return home, I cannot say that I was wholly free from apprehensions; but my heart was greatly lightened of its load. I have attended at the same place ever since; and have often been

encouraged in the same way. I am not without my doubts and fears, lest my peace should prove unfounded; and by a careful re-perusal of both your letters, I perceive that if your principles be true it is so. Yet surely my hope is not all in vain! I tremble at the thought of sinking again into the horrors of despondency.

I am yours, with much respect,

EPAPHRAS.

LETTER VI.

[Archippus to Epaphras.]

My dear young Friend,

If I have been interested by your former letters, I must say, I am doubly so by your last. Your case appears to me to be delicate and dangerous. Yet I feel myself in a very unpleasant situation I cannot speak the truth without its having the appearance of a want of feeling towards you, and of something like invidiousness towards those with whom you associate. If I could remain silent with a good conscience, I should certainly do so.

It afforded me pleasure to learn that you had refused consolation from several of those sources, which heal the hurt of a sinner slightly, crying, peace, peace, when there is no peace: but without taking upon me to decide upon the personal religion of the parties, I must declare my firm persuasion that you have not refused them *all.* I cannot think a whit the better of a ministry on account of its being spoken of as "singularly evangelical." Such language frequently means no more than that a preacher is very orthodox in his own esteem, or, at most, that his preaching is singularly adapted to soothe and comfort his people. But these things are no proof that it is the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not deny the character of good men, or of gospel ministers, to all who have advanced doctrines like those by which you were comforted; but I am persuaded that in respect of these principles, they are anti-evangelical. I have no desire, however to impose my opinion upon you. Believe neither of us any farther than what we advance accords with the oracles of God.

What is it, I would ask, *that has given you relief?* Is it any thing in the gospel? any thing in the doctrine of the cross? If so,

rejoice in your associates, and let your associates rejoice in you. If it be so, you have no reason to "doubt or fear," or cherish any "misgivings of heart." That consolation which proceeds from these sources is undoubtedly of God. But you will ask, Is there no true consolation but what is derived *directly* from the doctrine of the cross? may we not be comforted by a consciousness of that in our own souls, to which God has promised everlasting life? I answer, We certainly may: the scriptures point out many things as evidences of a work of grace; and if we be conscious that we are the subjects of them, we are warranted to conclude ourselves interested in eternal life. But it becomes us to beware of reckoning those things as evidences of grace which are not so, and to which no promises are made in the word of God. If the account which you have given be accurate, the evidence from which your encouragement was drawn was mere *distress:* distress, in which your "heart was too hard to repent," and under which you "*could not* believe." Yet, on account of this distress, you have been complimented with possessing a "broken heart, a poor and contrite spirit;" and the promises made to such characters have been applied to you. If these things be just, a hard heart, and a contrite spirit may be found in the same person, and at the same time. To this may be added, though believers derive consolation from a consciousness of that within them to which the scriptures promise everlasting life; yet this is not the way in which the Spirit of God *first* imparts relief to the soul. The first genuine consolation that is afforded, is by something *without* ourselves, even by the doctrine of the cross: whilst this is rejected or disregarded, we are unbelievers, and cannot possibly be the subjects of any disposition or exercise of mind which is pleasing to God, or to which he has promised salvation: and, consequently cannot be conscious of any thing of the kind.

The first relief enjoyed by the manslayer was from a city of refuge being provided: after he had entered in, he would derive additional consolation from knowing that he was within its gates: and thus it is that *rest to the soul* is promised to them that *come to Jesus*, *take his yoke*, and *learn his spirit*. But the rest which you have found was, not by *coming to him* as weary and heavy laden,

but from a consciousness that you *was* weary and heavy laden, and by being taught that this was a true sign of future deliverance. You have found rest, it seems, without coming to Jesus that you may have life.

If indeed your spirit is "poor and contrite;" if it be a grief of heart to you to reflect on your conduct towards the best of beings; if a view of the cross of Christ excite to mourning, on account of that for which he died; then is thy heart with my heart; and with the greatest satisfaction I can add, give me thine hand. Yes; if so, your heart is with God's heart, with Christ's heart, and with the heart of all holy beings; and all holy beings will offer thee their hand. But in this case you not only *can*, but *do* repent, and believe in Jesus. The question is, is *that distress* of soul which is antecedent to all godly sorrow for sin, and in the midst of which the sinner is not willing to come to Jesus as utterly unworthy that he may have life, any evidence of a work of grace? If it be, Saul during his last years, and Judas in his last hours, were each gracious characters. If ever men were weary and heavy laden, they were: but neither of them came to Jesus with his burden—neither of them found rest for his soul.

Consider, I beseech you, whether that distress of soul which has preceded and issued in true conversion, be ever represented in the scripture as an evidence of a work of grace; or whether the parties were ever comforted on that ground. Do re-peruse the cases already referred to, of Peter's address to the murderers of Christ, and that of Paul and Silas to the jailor.

Consider impartially, whether the distinction of sinners into *insensible* and *sensible*, with a design to exclude the former from being the proper objects of gospel invitation, be justifiable. A *compliance* with the invitation doubtless implies a just sense of sin, and a thirst after spiritual blessings; and so does a compliance with the divine precepts: but it does not follow that either the invitations or the precepts are improperly *addressed* to sinners, whether sensible or insensible. Those who *made light* of the gospel supper, were as really and properly invited to to it as those who accepted it. Those also who were invited to buy and eat, to buy wine and milk without money and without price, are described as

spending their money for that which was not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. The same invitation, which in the beginning of that chapter, is given in figurative language, is immediately afterwards expressed literally, and runs thus—*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* The *thirst*, therefore, which they are supposed to feel, could be no other than the desire of happiness, which they vainly hoped to assuage in the enjoyments of this world; but which God assures them could never be assuaged but by the blessings of the gospel, the sure mercies of David. The invitation of our Saviour to the weary and heavy laden, is manifestly a quotation from Jeremiah vi. 16. and the people who were there invited to stand in the ways and see, to inquire after the old paths, and the good way, and to walk therein, with the promise that they should find rest to their souls, were so far from being sensible of their sin, that they impudently answered, *We will not walk therein.* To confine the invitations of scripture to *sensible* sinners, and to hold up the blessings of the gospel as *belonging* to them, before, and as the ground of their compliance, is to pervert the word of God.

But why do I thus write? Is it because I want to plunge my dear young friend into the gulf of despondency? Far be this from me! My desire is to draw him off from all false dependencies, and to lead him if it might be, to rest upon the Rock of Ages. Is it consolation that he wants? Let me remind him of what I have said before. If he be willing to relinquish every other ground of hope, and to embrace Jesus as the only name given under heaven and among men, by which we can be saved, there is nothing in heaven or earth to hinder it. I have no desire to persuade you that you are not in a converted state. It may be, that which you have said of your being unable to repent or believe in Christ, was the language of despondency. Hardness of heart and unbelief are found even in believers themselves, and are frequently the objects of lamentation. There are seasons especially, in which it may seem even to a good man, as if he were void of all tenderness of heart, and all regard for Christ. Whether this was your

case at that time, or not, I feel no regret for having directed you, as a perishing sinner, to believe in Jesus for salvation, rather than encouraged you to think the best of your state from any supposed symptoms of grace that might be found in you. I would do the same with any religious professor who should be in a state of doubt and darkness respecting the reality of his religion: for if there be any true religion in us, it is much more likely to be discovered and drawn forth into actual exercise by an exhibition of the glory and grace of Christ, than by searching for it among the rubbish of our past feelings. To discover the small grains of steel mixed among a quantity of dust, it were much better to make use of a magnet than a microscope.

An exhibition of the name of Christ is that by which the thoughts of the heart are revealed. To him, therefore, as a guilty and perishing sinner. I must still direct you. If you be indeed of a broken and contrite spirit; if true grace have a being in your soul, though it be but as the smoking flax, his name will so far be precious to you. To him your desires will ascend; in him they will centre; on his righteousness all your hope of acceptance with God will be placed; and, when this is the case, you will find rest to your soul.

I am,

Yours, with sincere affection,

ARCHIPPUS.

PART OF

A

BODY OF DIVINITY.*

LETTER I.

My Dear Brother,

Respecting your request of a monthly letter, I acknowledge I have wished, for several years past, to give as far as I was able, *a connected view of the gospel;* but have hitherto wanted either sufficient leisure, or sufficient inducement, seriously to set about it. The difficulty of giving every part of divine truth its due importance, and of placing it in the system where it will have the greatest effact, is such, that I have no expectation of doing it to my own satisfaction: but I am willing to try. May the Holy Spirit of God preserve my heart and mind, that I may neither be misled, nor

* I think it was about the beginning of the year 1814, that Mr. Fuller, in compliance with my request, began a series of letters, intending to send me one of them every month, till he had gone through a *Body of Divinity*. His ill health and many engagements prevented him from punctually fulfilling his design; and I had received only *nine* letters, when his blessed master called him away. These he had no opportunity to correct, nor can any perfect idea be formed of the whole plan he would have pursued: yet they seem to me too valuable to be withheld from the public; though they certainly demand a more candid perusal than if they had been prepared by himself for the press. R.

contribute to the misleading of others! Pray that this may be the case; and as you receive my letters, make free remarks upon them, and let me see them.

Before I enter upon particulars, I wish to obviate some objections to the study of *systematical* divinity, and to show its importance to a just and enlarged view of the gospel. For this purpose, I must beg leave to introduce part of a sermon, which I printed nearly eighteen years ago *On the Importance of a Deep and Intimate Acquaintance with Divine Truth.*

"If we would possess a deep and intimate acquaintance with divine truth, *we must view it in its various connexions in the great system of redemption.* Systematical divinity, or the studying of truth in a systematic form, has been, of late years, much decried. It has become almost general to consider it as the mark of a contracted mind and the grand obstruction to free inquiry. If we imbibe a *false* system, indeed, there is no doubt but it will prove injurious; if it be true in part, but very defective, it may impede our progress in divine knowledge; or if, in order to retain a system, we torture the scriptures to make them accord with it, we shall pervert the truth, instead of preserving it. These are things which make against *false*, *defective*, and *antiscriptural* systems of faith; but not in the least against *system itself.* The best criterion of a good system is, its agreement with the holy scriptures. That view of things, whether we have any of us fully attained it, or not, which admits the most natural meaning to be put upon every part of God's word, is the right system of religious truth. And he whose belief consists of a number of positions arranged in such a connexion as to constitute a consistent whole, but who, from a sense of his imperfection, and a remembrance of past errors, holds himself ready to add or retrench, as evidence shall require, is in a far more advantageous track for the attainment of truth, and a real enlargement of mind, than he who thinks without a system.

"To be without system, is nearly the same thing as to be without principle. Whatever principles we may have, while they continue in this disorganized state, they will answer but little purpose in the religious life. Like a tumultuous assembly in the day

of battle, they may exist; but it will be without order, energy, or end.

"No man could decry systematical knowledge in any thing but religion, without subjecting himself to the ridicule of thinking men. A *philosopher*, for instance, would expose himself to contempt, who, instead of improving facts which had fallen under his observation, that he might discover the general laws by which they are governed; and, instead of tracing things to their first principles, and pursuing them to their just consequences, should inveigh against all general laws, all system, all connexion and dependence, and all uniform design, in the variety of creation. What should we say of a *husbandman* who refused to arrange his observations under the respective branches of business to which they belonged; who had no general scheme, or plan of proceeding; but left the work of every day to the day itself, without forethought, contrivance or design? Or what opinion should we form of a *merchant*, or *tradesman*, who should exclude systematical knowledge from his affairs? He is constantly employed in buying and selling; but he must have no general system whereby to conduct either the one or the other; none for the regulation of his books; none for the assortment of his articles: all must be free, lest he sink into formality, and, by being in the habit of doing things in order, should contract a narrowness of mind!

"'But is the Bible written upon systematical principles; does it contain a system; or does it encourage us to form one?' By the Bible being written on systematical principles, I suppose is meant a systematical arrangement of its contents: and there is no doubt but the contrary of this is true. But then the same might be said of the book of nature. Though the different species of animals, vegetables, minerals, &c. are capable of being arranged under their respective *genera*, and so reduced to a system; yet, in their actual position in creation, they assume no such appearance. It is wisely contrived, both in nature and scripture, that the objects of each should be scattered in lovely variety; but amidst all this variety, an observant eye will perceive unity, order, arrangement, and fulness of design.

"God, in all his works, has proceeded on system: there is a beautiful connexion and harmony in every thing which he has wrought. We sometimes speak of a system of nature, a system of providence and a system of redemption; and, as smaller systems are often included in greater, the language is not improper: in reality, however, they are all but one system; one grand piece of machinery, each part of which has a dependence on the other, and all together form one glorious whole. Now, if God proceed on system, it may be expected that the scriptures, being a transcript of his mind, should contain a system; and if we would study them to purpose, it must be so as to discover what that system is.

"I never recollect to have heard any objection to systematical divinity with regard to *practice*. Let a Christian, utterly unacquainted with human writings, take his Bible, with a view to learn the mind of God upon any given subject, suppose it be *the duty of parents:* he will naturally collect all the passages in the sacred writings which relate to that subject, arrange them in order, and, from the whole thus taken together, regulate his conduct. For this, no one will think of blaming him: yet this would be acting systematically. Let him do the same with respect to every other duty, and he will be in possession of a body, or system of practical divinity. And why should he stop here? Why not collect the mind of God from the whole of scripture taken together, upon things to be believed, as well as things to be performed?

"If the apostles had not considered divine truth in a systematical form, how came the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews to speak of the *first principles* of the oracles of God. This language supposes, as before observed, a scheme, or system of faith. And if such a form of considering truth were disadvantageous to Christians, how came he to censure the Hebrews for their want of progress in it? In the Epistle to the Romans, we read of the *proportion*, or *analogy* of faith; which certainly supposes that the gospel is one proportionate, or consistent whole.

"Could a system of divinity be written, in which every sacred truth or duty should have a place assigned it, and such a place, both as to order and importance, as properly belonged to it, not invading the province of other truths or duties, but, on the contrary,

subserving them, and itself appearing to the greatest advantage among them ; such a performance would, I conceive, answer to what the Apostle means by the *proportion of faith*. ' But can we expect a work answering to this description from an uninspired pen ?' Perhaps not. The materials for such a model, however, exist in the holy scriptures ; and, though we cannot collect and arrange them to perfection, let us, as in all other things, *press towards the mark.*

" Let that system of religion which we embrace be but, in the main, the right one, and, so far from contracting the mind, it is easy to perceive that it will abundantly enlarge it.

" For example : Let the fact of Joseph's being sold into Egypt be viewed without its connexion with God's designs, and it will appear a melancholy instance of human depravity : we shall see nothing very remarkable in it, and it will seem calculated only to afford a disgusting picture of family jealousies and intrigues, enough to break the heart of an aged parent. But let the same fact be viewed systematically, as a link in a chain, or as a part of a whole, and it will assume a very different appearance. Thus viewed, it is an event pregnant with glory. He must needs go down into Egypt, that much people might be preserved alive ; that Jacob's family might follow him ; that they might there be preserved for a season, till, in due time, having become a great nation, they should be led forth with a high hand ; that they might be placed in Canaan, and might set up the worship of the true God ; that the Messiah might be born among them ; and that his kingdom might be extended over the whole earth. Without a system, the Patriarch reflected, *All these things are against me:* but with a system, or rather with the discovery of only a small part of it, he exclaimed, *It is enough : Joseph my son is yet alive : I will go down and see him before I die.*

" In addition to this event in providence, let us offer a few examples in matters of *doctrine.*

" Would you contemplate the *great evil of sin*, you must view it in its connexions, tendencies, and consequences. For a poor finite creature, whose life is but a vapour, to gratify a vicious inclination may appear a trifle ; but when its tendencies and mischievous con-

sequences are taken into the account, it wears a different aspect. Jeroboam *said in his heart, if this people go up to sacrifice at Jerusalem, then shall the kingdom return unto David.* Hence he set up idolatry ; and hence the nation was corrupted more and more, till, at length, it was given up to utter destruction. Considering ourselves as links in the great chain of moral government, every transgression is of vast importance, because it affects the whole system. If the government of God be once violated, an example is set, which, if followed, would ruin the universe.

" Farther : If we contemplate *the death of Christ* without any relation to system, we shall only see a suffering person at Jerusalem, and feel that pity and disgust which are ordinarily excited by injustice and cruelty. But let us view it as connected with the moral government of God ; as a glorious expedient to secure its honours ; *a propitiation*, wherein *God declared his righteousness for the remission of sins ;* and we shall have a new set of feelings. While the apostles continued to view this event unconnectedly, their minds were contracted, and sorrow filled their hearts ; but when their eyes were opened to see it in its connexions and consequences, their sorrow was turned into joy. Those very persons who, but a few weeks before, could not bear to think of their Lord's departure, could witness his ascension to glory without regret : returning to Jerusalem with great joy, *they continued daily in the temple, praising and blessing God.*

" Once more : If we view the *doctrine of election* as unconnected with other things, it may appear to us to be a kind of fondness, without reason or wisdom. A charge of caprice would hereby be preferred against the Almighty : and professors, like the carnal Jews, on account of the distinguishing favours conferred upon them, would be fostered in self-conceit. But if it be considered in connexion with the great system of religious truth, it will appear in a very different light. It will represent the Divine Being in his true character ; not as acting without design, and subjecting himself to endless disappointments ; but as accomplishing all his works in pursuance of an eternal purpose. And, as salvation from first to last is of mere grace, and every son and daughter of Adam is abso-

lutely at the divine discretion, it tends powerfully to impress this idea both upon saints and sinners. While it leads the former to acknowledge, that by the grace of God they are what they are, it teaches the latter to relinquish their vain hopes, and to fall into the arms of sovereign mercy.

"As the righteousness of God's elect is not the ground of their election, so neither is their felicity its ultimate end. God righteously hides the things of the gospel from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes; because *so it seemeth good in his sight:* it tends most to display the glory of his character, and to promote the general good of creation. These things, if properly considered, are of a humbling tendency.

"If the Jews had considered that they were not chosen, or put in possession of the good land, *for their righteousness, or for the uprightness of their hearts;* and that though it was an instance of great love to them, yet it was not ultimately for their sakes, or to accomplish their happiness, but *that God might fulfil his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,* in whom, and in whose seed, all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; and if they had considered the salvation of the world as the end of their national existence, and themselves as *God's witnesses* till the times of reformation; instead of valuing themselves, and despising others, they would have reckoned themselves *their servants for Jehovah's sake.*

"In short, By considering principles in their various connexions, *far greater advances will be made in divine knowledge, than by any other means.* The discovery of one important truth will lead on to a hundred more. Let a Christian but realize, for example, the glory of the divine character as Moral Governor of the world, and he will at once perceive the equity and goodness of the moral law, which requires us to love him with all the heart. In this glass, he will see his own depravity; and, possessed of these views, the grace of the gospel will appear to him to be grace indeed. Every blessing it contains will be endearing, and the medium through which all is conveyed, superlatively precious. A train of thought like this has frequently proved more interesting

than the labours of those, who, having discovered a vein of silver or gold, dig deeply into the bowels of the enriching mine."

Thus far I have extracted from my sermon on Heb. v. 12—14, to show the importance of *system:* In my next I shall endeavour to show the importance of the *true* system. Meanwhile

I am

Affectionately yours,

A. F.

LETTER II.

My dear Brother,

In my last, as I intimated at the close, I endeavoured to show the importance of *system:* in this I shall attempt to show the importance of *a true* system ; and to prove that truth itself, by being displaced from those connexions which it occupies in the scriptures, may be perverted, and prove injurious to those that hold it. No system can be supposed to be *wholly* erroneous ; but if a considerable part of it be false, the whole will be vitiated, and that which is true will be divested of its salutary influence. *If ye be circumcised,* said the Apostle to the Galatians, *Christ shall profit you nothing.* As one truth thoroughly imbibed, will lead to a hundred more, so will one error. False doctrine will *eat as doth a gangrene;* which, though it may seem to be confined to one part of the body, infects the whole mass, and, if not extracted, must issue in death.

If one put on the profession of Christianity without cordially believing it, it will not sit easy upon him ; his heart will not be in it : and if, at the same time, he live in the indulgence of secret vice, he will soon feel it necessary to new model his religious opinions. It degrades him, even in his own esteem, to be a hypocrite ; avowing one thing and practising another. In order to be *easy*, therefore it becomes necessary for him to have a new creed, that he may answer the reproaches of his conscience, and it may be those of his acquaintance, by the assumption that *his ideas are changed.* He begins by doubting ; and, having, by criminal indulgence, effaced all sense of the holiness of God from his mind, he thinks of him only in respect of what he calls his goodness, which he hopes will induce him to connive at his frailties. With thoughts like these, of God and of sin, he will soon find himself in possession of a system. A new field of thought opens to his mind,

in which he finds very little need of Christ, and becomes, in his own eyes, a being of consequence. Such, or nearly such, was the process of those who perished, *because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sent them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* But passing these delusive systems, truth itself, if viewed out of its *scriptural connexions*, is vitiated and injurious. The members of our bodies are no otherwise beneficial, than as they occupy the places in which the Creator has fixed them. If the foot were in the place of the hand, or the ear of the eye, instead of being useful they would each be injurious: and the same is true of a preposterous view of scripture doctrines. The Jews in the time of our saviour, professed the same creed, in the main, as their forefathers: they reckoned themselves to believe Moses; but holding with Moses to the exclusion of Christ, their faith was rendered void. *If ye believed Moses*, said our Lord, *ye would believe me; for he wrote of me.* Thus it is with us: if we hold the law of Moses to the exclusion of Christ, or any otherwise than as subservient to the gospel; or Christ and the gospel to the exclusion of the law of Moses; neither the one or the other will profit us.

To illustrate and confirm these observations, I shall select, for examples, three of the leading doctrines of the gospel; namely, *election*, *the atonement*, and *the influence of the Holy Spirit.*

If the doctrine of election be viewed in those connexions in which it stands in the scriptures, it will be of great importance in the Christian life. The whole difference between the saved and the lost being ascribed to sovereign grace, the pride of man is abased. The believer is taught to feel and acknowledge, that by the grace of God he is what he is; and the sinner to apply for mercy, not as being on terms with his Maker, but absolutely at his discretion. It is frequently the last point which a sinner yields to God. To relinquish every claim and ground of hope from his own good endeavours, and fall at the feet of sovereign mercy, requires that he be born of God. If we take our views of this great subject in its connexion with others, I need not say we shall not consider it

as founded on any thing good *foreseen* in us, whether it be faith or good works: this were to exclude the idea of an *election of grace;* and to admit, if not to establish boasting. Neither shall we look at the end in such a way as to lose sight of the *means.* We shall consider it as we do other divine appointments, not as revealed to us to be a rule of conduct, but to teach us our entire dependence upon God. We are given to believe that whatever good or evil befals us we are *thereunto appointed.** The time of our continuance in the world is as much an object of divine purpose as our eternal destiny; but we do not imagine, on this account, that we shall live though we neither eat nor drink; nor presume that though we leap headlong from a precipice, no danger will befal us. Neither does it hinder us from exhorting or persuading others to pursue the way of safety, and to flee from danger. In these things, we act the same as if there were no divine appointments, or as if we believed nothing concerning them; but when we have done all that can be done, the sentiment of an all-disposing providence recurs to mind, and teaches us that we are still in the hands of God Such were the views of good men, as recorded in scripture. They believed the days of man to be *appointed,* and that he could not *pass his bounds;* yet, in time of famine, the patriarch Jacob, sent to Egypt to buy corn, *that they might live and not die.* Elisha knew of a certainty that Benhadad would die; yet, speaking of him in respect of his disease, he did not scruple to say, *He may recover.* The Lord assured Paul in his perilous voyage, that *there should be no loss of any man's life; yet,* when he saw the ship-men making their escape, he said to the centurion, *Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*

A fleshly mind may ask, *How can these things be?* How can divine predestination accord with human agency and accountableness? But a truly humble Christian, finding both in his Bible, will believe both, though he may be unable fully to understand their consistency; and will find in the one a motive to depend entirely on God, and in the other a caution against slothfulness and presumptuous neglect of duty. And thus a Christian minister, if he view the doctrine in its proper connexions, will find nothing in it to hinder the free use of warnings, invitations, and persuasions,

* 1 Thes. iii. 3.

either to the converted or the unconverted. Yet he will not ground his hopes of success on the pliability of the human mind, but on the promised grace of God ; who, (while he prophesies to the dry bones, as he is commanded,) is known to inspire them with the breath of life.

Thus it was, that the Apostle, while, in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, he traces the sovereignty of God in calling some from among the Jews, and leaving others to perish in unbelief, never thought of excusing that unbelief, nor felt any scruples in exhorting and warning the subjects of it, nor in praying for their salvation. Even in his preaching to the Gentiles, he kept his eye on them, if by any, means he might provoke to emulation those who were his flesh and might save some of them.

But, whatever this doctrine is in itself, yet, if viewed out of its connexions, or in connexions which do not belong to it, it will become another thing. God's election of the posterity of Abraham was of sovereign favour, and not on account of any excellence in them, natural or moral; in which view it was humbling, and no doubt had a good effect on the godly Israelites. But the Jews in our Saviour's time, turned this, their national election, into another kind of doctrine, full of flattery towards themselves, and of the most intolerable contempt and malignity towards others. And thus the doctrine of eternal and personal election, viewed in a similar light, becomes a source of pride, bitterness, sloth, and presumption. Conceive of the love of God as capricious fondness ; imagine, because it had no inducement from the goodness of the creature, that therefore it was without reason, only so it was and so it must be ; view it, not as a mean by which God would assert the sovereignty of his grace, but as an end to which every thing must become subservient ; conceive of yourself as a darling of heaven, a favourite of providence, for whom divine interpositions, next to miracles, are continually occurring ; and, instead of being humbled before God, as a poor sinner, you will feel like a person who, in a dream, or a reverie, imagines himself a king, takes state to himself, and treats every one about him with distant contempt.

If the doctrine of *atonement* be viewed in the connexions in

which it stands in the sacred scriptures, it is the life-blood of the gospel system. Consider it as a method devised by the infinite wisdom of God, by which he might honour his own name by dispensing mercy to the unworthy in a way consistent with righteousness, and we shall be furnished with considerations at once the most humiliating and transporting that were ever presented to a creature's mind.

But there are ways of viewing this doctrine which will render it void, and even worse than void. If, for instance, instead of connecting it with the divinity of Christ, we ascribe its efficacy to divine *appointment*, the name may remain, but that will be all. On this principle, it *was* possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should have taken away sin, and that the cup should have passed away from the Saviour, without his drinking it. As there would, on this principle, be no necessity for the death of Christ, so neither could there be any great love displayed by it; and as to its constraining influence, we need not look for it.

Or, if the atonement be considered as *a reparation to man*, for the injury done him by his being connected with his first parents, it is rendered void. Whatever evil we derive from our first parents, while we ourselves choose it, we are no more injured than if we derived it from our immediate parents; and it will no more bear to be pleaded at the last judgment, than it will bear to be alleged by a thief at an earthly tribunal, that his father had been a thief before him. To argue therefore, as some have done, that if Christ had not come into the world, and given us grace, so as to remove the inability for doing good, under which we lay as the descendants of Adam, we should not have been blameworthy for not doing it, is to render grace no more grace, and the atonement a satisfaction to man, rather than to God. If man would not have been blameworthy without the gift of Christ and a provision of grace, it would seem a pity that both had not been withheld, and that we had not been left to the justice of our Creator, who surely might be trusted not to punish for that in which we were not in fault.

Or, if the doctrine of atonement lead us to entertain *degrading notions of the law of God*, or to plead an *exemption from its pre-*

ceptive authority, we may be sure it is not the scripture doctrine of reconciliation. Atonement has respect to justice, and justice to the law, or the revealed will of a sovereign, which has been violated ; and its very design is to repair its honour. If the law which has been transgressed were unjust, instead of an atonement being required for the breach of it, it ought to have been repealed, and the lawgiver have taken upon himself the disgrace of having enacted it. Every instance of punishment among men is a sort of atonement to the justice of the country, the design of which is to restore the authority of good government, which transgression has impaired. But if the law itself was bad, or the penalty too severe, every sacrifice made to it must be an instance of cruelty. And should a prince of the blood royal, in compassion to the offenders, offer to suffer in their stead, for the purpose of atonement, whatever love it might discover on his part, it were still greater cruelty to except the offer, even though he might survive his sufferings. The public voice would be, ' There is no need of any atonement : it will do no honour, but dishonour to the legislature : and to call the liberation of the convicts an act of grace, is to add insult to injury. The law ought not to have been enacted, and now it is enacted, ought immediately to be repealed.' It is easy to see, from hence, that in proportion as the law is depreciated, the gospel is undermined, and both grace and atonement rendered void. It is the law as abused, or as turned into a *way of life* in opposition to the gospel, (for which it was never given to a fallen creature,) that the sacred scriptures depreciate it ; and not as the revealed will of God, the immutable standard of right and wrong. In this view, the Apostle delighted in it : and, if we be Christians, we shall delight in it too, and shall not object to be under it as a rule of duty ; for no man objects to be governed by laws which he loves.

Finally : If the doctrine of *divine influence* be considered in its scriptural connexions, it will be of essential importance in the Christian life ; but if these be lost sight of, it will become injurious.

To say nothing of *extraordinary* influence, I conceive there is what may be termed an *indirect* influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, having inspired the prophets and apostles, testified *in and by them*, and often without effect. *Many years didst thou forbare them, and testifiedst against them, by thy spirit, in hy prophets, yet they would not give ear.* The messages of the prophets being dictated by the Holy spirit, resistance of them was resistance of him. It was in this way, I conceive, that the Spirit of God *strove* with the antediluvians, and that unbelievers are said *always to have resisted the Holy Spirit.* But the divine influence to which I refer, is that by which sinners are renewed and sanctified; concerning which two things require to be kept in view.

First: *It accords with the scripture.* Is it the work of the Holy Spirit, for example, to illuminate the mind, or to guide us into truth? In order to try whether that which we account light be the effect of divine teaching, or only a figment of our own imagination, we must bring it to the written word. *To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* The Holy spirit teaches nothing but what is true, and what was true antecedently to his teaching it, and would have been true though we had never been taught it. Such are the glory of the divine character, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, our own guilty and lost condition as sinners, and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The test of divine illumination, therefore, is, whether that in which we conceive ourselves to be enlighted be a part of divine truth as revealed in the scriptures. Further: Is it the work of the Holy Spirit to *lead us in the paths of righteousness?* This also must be tried by the written word. The Holy Spirit leads us into nothing but what is *right* antecedently to our being led into it, and which would have been so though we had never been led into it. He that teacheth us to profit *leadeth us by the way that we should go.* The paths in which he leads us for his name's sake are *those of righteousness.* Such are those of repentance for sin, faith in Christ, love to God and one another, and every species of Christian obedience. One test, therefore, of our being led by the Spirit of God, in any way wherein we walk, is whether it be a part of the will of God as revealed in the scriptures. As the Holy Spirit teaches us nothing but what

was previously true, so he leads us into nothing but what was previously duty.

Secondly: Divine influence not only accords with the sacred scriptures, but requires to be *introduced in those connexions in which the scriptures introduce it.* We have heard it described as if it were a talent, the use or abuse of which would either issue in our salvation, or heighten our guilt. This is true of *opportunities* and *means of grace*, or of what is above described as the *indirect* influence of the Holy Spirit; but not of his *special* influence. The things done for the Lord's vineyard, concerning which he asks, *What more could I have done?* include the former, and not the latter. The mighty works done in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, relate not to the *special* influences of the spirit on their minds, but to the miracles wrought before their eyes, accompanied as they were by the heavenly doctrine. I do not remember an instance in the sacred scriptures, in which the *renewing* and *sanctifying* influences of the Spirit are thus represented. Divine influence has been introduced as an excuse for sin committed previously to our being the subject of it, as if, because it is necessary to any thing truly good being done by us, therefore it must be necessary to its being *required of* us. But, if so, there would have been no complaints of Simon the Pharisee, for his want of love to Christ; nor of unbelievers at the last judgment, for the same thing; nor would Paul have carried with him so humbling a sense of his sin, in having persecuted the church of God, while in unbelief, as to reckon himself the chief of sinners on account of it. The want of divine influence has been introduced as an apology for negligence and slothfulness in the Christian life. What else do men mean when they speak of this and the other duty as "no farther binding upon them than as the Lord shall enable them to discharge it?" If it be so, we have no sin to confess, for "not doing that which we ought to have done;" for, as far as the Lord enables us to discharge our obligations, we discharge them. The doctrine of divine influence is introduced in the sacred scriptures as a motive to activity. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.*

Finally : We have often heard this doctrine introduced in the pulpit in such a way as to weaken the force of what has been previously said on behalf of God and righteousness. When the sacred scriptures speak of the *cause* of good, they ascribe every thing to God's Holy Spirit. The writers seem to have no fear of going too far. And it is the same with them, when they exhort, or warn, or expostulate : they discover no apprehension of going so far as to render void the grace of God. In all their writings, the one never seems to stand in the way of the other : each is allowed its full scope, without any apparent suspicion of inconsistency between them. But is it so with us ? If one dares to exhort sinners, in the words of scripture, to *repent and believe the gospel*, he presently feels himself upon tender ground ; and if he does not recede, yet he must qualify his works, or he will be suspected of disbelieving the work of the Spirit ! To prevent this, he must needs introduce it, though it be only to blunt the edge of his exhortation—' Repent and believe the gospel : I know, indeed, you cannot do this of yourselves ; but you can pray for the Holy Spirit, to enable you to do it.'

It is right to pray for the Holy Spirit, as well as for every thing else that we need, and to exhort others to do so ; and it may be one of the first petitions of a mind returning to God, *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned :* but to introduce it *instead of repenting and believing*, and as something which a sinner *can* do, though he cannot do the other, is erroneous and dangerous.

Yours, &c.

A. F.

LETTER III.

My dear Brother,

I WISH, in this letter, to state the principle and general outlines of what I shall attempt. In observing different systematical writers, I perceive they have taken different methods of arrangement. The greatest number proceed on the analytical plan, beginning with the being and attributes of God, the creation of the world, moral government, the fall of angels and men, and so proceed to redemption by Jesus Christ, and the benefits and obligations resulting from it. One eminent divine, you know has treated the subject historically, tracing the gradual developement of divine truth as it actually took place in the order of time.* These different methods have each their advantages ; but it has for some time appeared to me, that the greater number of them have also their disadvantages ; so much so, as to render truth, in a systematical form, almost uninteresting.

I do not know how it may prove on trial, but I wish to begin with the centre of Christianity—*the doctrine of the cross*, and to work round it ; or with what may be called the heart of Christianity, and to trace it through its principal veins or relations, both in doctrine and practice. If Christianity had not been comprehended in this doctrine, the Apostle, who shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God, could not have determined to know nothing else in his ministry. The whole of the Christian system appears to be *presupposed by* it ; *included in* it, or to *arise from* it : if, therefore, I write any thing, it will be on this principle. In its favour, the following things may be alleged

First : It accords with *truth*. All things are said not only to have been created by Christ, but for him. All things in creation,

* President Edward's *History of Redemption.*

therefore, are rendered subservient to his glory as Redeemer; and being thus connected, they require to be viewed so, in order to be seen with advantage.

Secondly: By viewing all divine truths and duties, as related to one great object, as so many lines meeting in a centre, a character of *unity* is imparted to the subject, which it would not otherwise possess, and which seems properly to belong to the idea of a system. A system, if I understand it, is a *whole*, composed of a number of parts so combined and arranged as to show their proper connexions and dependencies, and to exhibit every truth and every duty to the best advantage. The unity of a number in one great object, and so forming a whole, gives an interest to the subject, which it would not otherwise possess. It is interesting, no doubt, to view the works of nature as revolving round the sun as their centre; but to view nature and providence as centering in the glory of the Redeemer, is much more interesting.

Thirdly: The object in which all the parts of the system are united being CHRIST, must tend to shed a sweet savour on the whole. We have often heard the epithet *dry* applied to the doctrines of the gospel, especially when systematically treated: but this must have arisen from the faults or defects of the system, or from the uninteresting manner of treating it, or from a defect in the hearer or reader. The doctrine of the gospel, if imparted in its genuine simplicity, and received in faith and love, *drops as the rain, and distils as the dew upon the tender herb.* I may not be able thus to impart it: but whether I do, or not, it may be done; and so far as I or any other may fail, let the fault be imputed to us, and not to the doctrine of God our Saviour.

Fourthly: There is a singular advantage attending the study of other truths through this medium. We might know something of God and of ourselves through the medium of the divine law; and it is necessary, for some purposes, to understand this subject as distinct from the gospel. But a sense of the holiness and justice of God, contrasted with our depravity and guilt, might be more than we could bear. To view these great subjects, on the other hand, through the cross of Christ, is to view the malady through

the medium of the remedy, and so never to want for an antidote of despair.

With the idea of all divine truth bearing an intimate relation to Christ, agrees that notable phrase, in Ephes. iv. 21. *The truth as it is in Jesus.* To believe the truth concerning Jesus, is to believe the whole doctrine of the scriptures. Hence it is, that in all the brief summaries of Christian doctrine, the person and work of Christ are prominent. Such are the following: *Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you among the first principles, that which I also received how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.—Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.—This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.—He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.—Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the son of God?* Fully aware that this golden link would draw along with it the whole chain of evangelical truth, the sacred writers seem careful for nothing in comparison of it. It is on this ground that faith in Christ is represented as essential to spiritual life. See John vi. 53—56. *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.* We may be Christians by education, may be well versed in Christianity as a science, may be able to converse and preach and write in defence of it; but if Christ crucified be not

that to us which food is to the hungry, and drink to the thirsty, we are dead while we live. It is on this ground that error concerning the person and work of Christ is of such importance as frequently to become death to the party. We may err on other subjects and survive, though it be in a maimed state ; but to err in this is to contract a disease in the vitals, the ordinary effect of which is death. When Peter confessed him to be the Son of the living God, Jesus answered, *Upon this rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Upon this principle, as a foundation, Christianity rests ; and it is remarkable, that, to this day, deviation concerning the person and work of Christ is followed by a derilection of almost every other evangelical doctrine, and of the spirit of Christianity. How should it be otherwise ? If the foundation be removed, the building must fall.

What is it that is denominated *the great mistery of godliness?* Is it not that *God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory?* It is this that the apostle John introduces at the beginning of his gospel, under the name of *the Word* : *The Word was with God, and was God ; by whom all things were made, and who was made flesh, and dwelt among us.** It is this upon which he dwells in the introduction of his first Epistle : *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us ; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* Christ is here described, 1. As to what he was in his pre-incarnate state ; namely, as that which was from the beginning, the word of life, and that eternal life which was with the Father. 2. As to what he became by his incarna-

* Whether we read *God*, or the *Son of God*, or the *Lord*, or the *Word*, the idea is the same. There is no meaning in saying of any one who was not God, that he was manifest in the flesh, or that he was made flesh, &c.

tion : he was so manifested that his disciples could see him, and look on him, and handle him ; and thus be qualified to bear witness of him, and to show unto others that eternal life that was with the Father. 3. As having opened a way in which those who believed in him were admitted to fellowship with God, and with him, and were commissioned to invite others to partake with them. I have long considered this passage as a decisive proof of the divinity of Christ, and as a summary of the gospel.

I am

Affectionately Yours

A. F.

LETTER IV.

ON THE BEING OF GOD.

My dear Brother,

HAVING, in the foregoing letters, endeavoured to show the importance of system, and of that system being the true one, and proposed the plan of what I may communicate, I shall now proceed to execute it as well as I am able. In the last letter it was stated concerning the doctrine of the cross, that every thing pertaining to Christianity was *presupposed by it*, *included in it*, or *rose out of it*. This threefold distribution will form the three parts into which what I write will be divided. Under the first; namely, *principles presupposed* by the doctrine of the cross, I begin with *the being of God*, to which fundamental principle this letter will be devoted. God is the first cause and last end of all things. *Of him, and through him, and to him are all things; to him be glory for ever, Amen!* To undertake to prove his existence seems to be almost as unnecessary as to go about to prove our own. The scriptures, at their outset, take it for granted; and he that calls it in question is not so much to be reasoned with as to be reproved. His error belongs to the heart, rather than to the understanding. His doubts are either affected, or arise from a wish to free himself from the idea of accountableness. The things that are seen in the visible creation contain so clear a manifestation of the things that are not seen, even of his eternal power and Godhead, as to leave Atheists and idolaters *without excuse*. Rom. i. 20.

All reasoning must proceed upon some acknowledged principles; and what can deserve to be so considered more than our own existence, and that of the great First Cause? There are truths

among men which it is indecorous to attempt to prove. To discuss the question, whether a parent ought to be acknowledged and obeyed by his children, whatever proof might be alleged for it, would tend to agitate a subject which ought to be at rest. I question whether argumentation in favour of the existence of God has not made more sceptics than believers. An Orissa pundit, not being able to see God, required of a missionary a proof of his existence. He was asked, in answer, whether he could see his own soul; and, whether he had any doubts of his possessing one. "Certainly not," said the pundit. "Such," said the missionary, "is the living God: he is invisible to us, but he is every where present."

In the early ages of the world there appears to have been a much stronger persuasion of divine interposition in human affairs, than generally prevails in our times. Even heathens, whose gods were vanity, put their trust in them. In all their wars they not only took counsel with their wise men, but consulted their oracles. Rollin, from Xenophon, holds it up as one of the great virtues of Cyrus that he respected the gods. "In the sight of all his army," says he, "he makes mention of the gods, offers sacrifices and libations to them, addresses himself to them by prayer and invocation, and implores their succour and protection. What a shame, then, and a reproach, would it be to a Christian officer or general, if, on a day of battle, he should blush to appear as religious and devout as a pagan prince; and if the Lord of hosts and God of armies, whom he acknowledges as such, should make a less impression on his mind, than a respect for the false deities of paganism did upon the mind of Cyrus." Yet this is the fact. Now and then, on an occasion of great success, God is acknowledged; but in general, he is disregarded. How is this to be accounted for? Cyrus' gods were *according to his mind*; but with the true God, *the dispositions of the greater part of mankind are at perfect variance.* Real Christians still acknowledge him in all their ways, and he directs their paths; but merely nominal Christians, having *a God who is not according to their minds*, think but little of him, feel ashamed to own him, and thus sink into practical Atheism. To know that there is a God is necessary, indeed, to true religion;

but if we stop there it will be of no use. What is the *Supreme Being* of modern unbelievers? and of what account is their knowledge of him? As the Author of the machinery of the universe, he is admired, and magnified in such a way, as to render it beneath him to interfere with the affairs of mortals, or to call them to account.

The true knowledge of God is less speculative than practical. It is remarkable with what deep reverence the inspired writers speak of God. Moses, when relating his appearance at the bush, did not attempt to explain his name, but communicated it in the words which he heard. *And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they will say unto me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses,* I AM THAT I AM: *and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel,* I AM *hath sent me unto you.* This sublime language suggests not only his self-existence, but his incomprehensibleness. It is beyond the powers of a creature even to be taught what he is.

"As to the being of God," says Dr. Owen, "we are so far from a knowledge of it, so as to be able to instruct one another therein by words and expressions of it, as that to frame any conceptions in our own mind, with such species and impressions of things as we receive the knowledge of all other things by, is to make an idol to ourselves, and so to worship a God of our own making, and not the God that made us. We may as well and as lawfully hew him out of wood and stone, as form him a being in our minds suited to our apprehensions. The utmost of the best of our thoughts of the being of God, is that we can have no thoughts of it. Our knowledge of a being is but low, when it mounts to no higher but only to know that we know it not. There be some things of GOD which he himself hath taught us to speak of, and to regulate our expressions of them; but when we have so done, we see not the things themselves, we know them not; to believe and to admire is all that we can attain to. We profess, as we are taught, that God is infinite, omnipotent, eternal; and we know what disputes and notions there are about omnipresence, immensity, infinity, and eter-

nity. We have, I say, words and notions about these things; but as to the things themselves, what do we know? what do we comprehend of them? Can the mind of man do any thing more but swallow itself up in an infinite abyss, which is as nothing? Give itself up to what it cannot conceive, much less express? Is not our understanding brutish, in the contemplation of such things? and is as if it were not? Yea, the perfection of our understanding is, not to understand, and to rest there: they are but the back parts of eternity and infinity that we have a glimpse of. What shall I say of the trinity, or the subsistence of distinct persons in the same individual essence; a mystery by many denied, because by none understood; a mystery whose very letter is mysterious. —*How little a portion is heard of him!*"

In the epistles of Paul there are various instances in which, having mentioned the name of GOD, he stops to pay him adoration. Thus, when describing the dishonour put upon him by worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator, he pauses and adds, *Who is blessed forever, Amen!* Thus also, speaking of Christ, as having *given himself to deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of* GOD AND OUR FATHER, he adds, *To* HIM *be glory for ever and ever, Amen!* And thus, when having spoken of the exceeding abundant grace shown to himself as the chief of sinners, he adds, *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen!*

It is the name of God that gives authority, importance and glory, to every person or thing with which it stands connected. The glory of man, above the rest of the creatures, consisted in this: *God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him.* This, and not merely the well-being of man, is the reason given why murder should be punished with death. *He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed;* FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MADE HE MAN. This is the great sanction to the precepts and threatenings of the law: *That thou mayest fear that fearful name,* THE LORD THY GOD. Herein consists the great evil of sin; and of that sin especially which is committed immediately against God. *Know thou therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing, and bitter, that thou hast forsaken* THE LORD THY GOD, *and that my*

fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the LORD *who shall intreat for him?* The sin of the men of Sodom, though it had reached to heaven, yet was not completed till they persevered in it, when smitten of God with blindness. Pharaoh and the Egyptians had greviously oppressed Israel; but it was by persevering in their sins, notwithstanding the judgments of God, and presuming to follow his people into the sea, that they brought upon themselves destruction. Of this nature was the disobedience of Saul, the boasting of Sennacherib and Rabshakeh, the pride of Nebuchadnezzar, the profanation of the sacred vessels by Belteshazzar, and the shutting up John in prison by Herod. Each of these men had done much evil before; but, by setting themselves directly against GOD, they sealed their doom. It is on this principle that idolatry and blasphemy were punished with death under the theocracy, and that under the gospel, unbelief and apostacy are threatened with damnation.

GOD manifested himself in creation, in giving laws to his creatures, in the providential government of the world, and in other ways; but all these exhibited him only in part; it is in the gospel of salvation, through his dear Son, that his whole character appears; so that from invisible, he in a sense becomes visible. *No one had seen God at any time; but the only begotten Son, who dwelleth in the bosom of the Father, he declared him.* What is it that believers see in the gospel, when their minds are spiritually enlightened? It is *the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.* Whatever is visible in an object is called its *face.* Thus we speak of the face of the heavens, of the earth, and of the sea; and in each of these the glory of God is to be seen: but in the face of Jesus Christ; that is, in that which has been manifested to us by his incarnation, life, preaching, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension, the glory of God is seen in a degree that it has never been seen in before. The Apostle, when speaking of God in relation to the gospel, uses the epithet *blessed* with singular propriety: *According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.* The gospel is the grand emanation from the fountain of blessedness, an overflow of the divine goodness. It is the infinitely happy God, pouring

forth his happiness upon miserable sinners, through Jesus Christ. The result is, that as God is the Great Supreme, he must in all things occupy the supreme place. Thus we are required, by his law, to love him first, and then to love our neighbour as ourselves; and thus the coming of Christ is celebrated, first as giving glory to God in the highest, and then peace on earth and good will to men.

Affectionately yours,

A. F.

LETTER V.

ON THE NECESSITY OF A DIVINE REVELATION.

My dear Brother,

It would be improper, I conceive, to rest the being of God on scripture testimony; seeing the whole weight of that testimony must depend upon the supposition that he is, and that the sacred scriptures were written by holy men inspired by him. Hence the scriptures, at their outset, take this principle for granted: yet in the way that the works of nature imply a divine first cause, so does the work of revelation. Men were as morally unable to write such a book as they were naturally unable to create the heavens and the earth. In this way the sacred scriptures prove the being of a God.

I wish to offer a few remarks on the necessity of a divine revelation—on the evidence of the Bible being written by inspiration of God, so as to answer this necessity—and on its uniform bearing on the doctrine of salvation through the cross of Christ: but, as this is more than can be comprehended in a single letter, I must divide it into two or three.

First: I shall offer a few remarks on *the necessity of a revelation from God.* In establishing this principle, let it be observed, we are not required to depreciate the light of nature. The word of God is not to be exalted at the expense of his works. The evidence which is afforded of the being and perfections of God, by the creation which surrounds us, and of which we ourselves are a part, is no more superceded by revelation, than the law is rendered void by faith. All things which proceed from God are in harmony with each other. If all the evidence which the heathens have, of the being and perfections of God, consist of traditional

accounts derived originally from revelation, there must be great uncertainty in it, as in every thing else that comes through such an uncertain medium; and if so, though they should disbelieve it how are they *without excuse?* and how are we to understand the reasonings of the Apostle, on the subject? he appears to represent the wrath of God as revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, *because that which may be known is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him, that is, his eternal power and godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made: so that they are* WITHOUT EXCUSE. This is equal to saying, God is invisible, but his works are visible: his eternal power and godhead are manifest from the things which he has created. All things which have a beginning must originate in a cause without beginning; so that they are without excuse. Whether the heathens in any instance have, or have not, *actually perceived* the eternal power and godhead of the Creator, merely from the works of his hands, is a question that I shall not undertake to answer. If such a case never occurred, it is sufficient for my argument that it has not been for want of objective light, but of a state of mind to receive it. In pleading for the necessity of divine revelation, as the means of enlightening and saving sinners, we should beware of imitating those who, in arguing for the necessity of divine grace to renew and sanctify them, represent them as physically unable to do good without it, and so excuse them in their sins. *Every mouth will be stopped, and all the world,* whatever advantages or disadvantages they may have possessed in these respects, *will be found guilty before God.* It is true, that the guilt of those who have lived in sin without the light of revelation, will be much less than theirs who have continued in their sins under it; but all are without excuse before God. Divine revelation is necessary to a *competent* knowledge of God, and of his will concerning us. This principle will be evident by a review of two others; namely, the insufficiency of human reason for these important purposes, and the connexion between revelation and faith.

1. *Let us review the insufficiency of human reason to obtain from the mere light of nature a competent knowledge of God, and*

of his will concerning us. The light of nature furnishes us with little or no knowledge of the moral character and government of God. While man was in a state of innocence, indeed he might, by reflecting on his own mind, understand something of the character of that divine Original, after whose image he was created; but having sinned, this image is effaced. It is also true, that the judgments of God against sinners are manifest in all the earth; and every man's conscience bears witness that what is wrong in another towards him, must be wrong in him towards another; and that, having felt and acted contrary to this equitable principle, in innumerable instances, he is a sinner; but as to the evil nature of sin, as committed against God, and his own lost condition, conscience itself can yield him little or no information. And as to an hereafter, whether there be any, and if there be, what it will prove; whether we shall have to give account of the deeds done in the body; whether there will be any hope of forgiveness; and what we must do to be saved; all is darkness. The light of nature, though sufficient to bear witness for God, and to leave sinners without excuse, was never designed, in any state, to furnish man with all he needed. Even in innocence man was governed by a revealed law. It does not appear that he was left to find out the character or will of his Creator by his reason, though reason, being under the influence of rectitude, would lead him as he understood the mind of God, to love and obey it. But if revelation was necessary in innocence, much more now man's foolish heart is darkened by sin.

The state of the heathens, who are without divine revelation, furnishes awful proof of its necessity. The grossness of their thoughts of God, and of a hereafter, is such, that those who have received the light of revelation can scarcely think it possible for rational beings to entertain them. To say nothing of the uncivilized heathen, even the polished sons of Greece and Rome, though prodigies in science, yet in relation to these things, were the subjects of the most sottish stupidity. Well is it said, *The world by wisdom knew not God.* That small portion of real light which on these subjects appears in the writings of our modern Deists, is borrowed from those very writings which they mean to depreciate.

They live in the neighbourhood of revelation, and, whether they will own it or not, are enlightened by it. The speculations of those who have had only the light of nature to guide them, are, in respect of God and religion, absurd in the extreme.

Man is said to be *wiser than the beasts of the field;* but it is principally by means of *instruction.* We are born, it is true, with an immortal mind, but uninformed, what is it? Knowledge chiefly enters in at the door of the senses. To what do we owe the gift of speech? It seems to be natural to us; but if we look at one who is born deaf, we shall find him dumb also; and if to this be added blindness, there will be but little difference between him and the beasts of the field. But if we need human instruction for the attainment of knowledge in things of this life, is it surprising that we should need a divine instructor for things heavenly and divine? It is true, that God instructs us, as has been said, by his works; but they contain only a few of the rudiments of divine knowledge: like the parables of our Saviour, they were not designed to furnish perfect information on the subject, but merely a general intimation, tending to excite humble inquiry for further instruction; which, when asked, was readily granted, but, when set at nought, it was *seeing and not perceiving, hearing and not understanding; lest they should be converted and healed.* The Apostle, in his address to the Athenians, represents it as the design of God, in his works of creation and providence, to lead men to *seek him:* but, though he was not far from every one, seeing all live and move and have their being in him, yet the light of nature could only enable them *to feel after him, if haply they might find him.* Though *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork*; though *day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge*, and though their voice is heard in every language and in every clime, even to the end of the world; yet it is not by them, but by the word of Jehovah that souls are converted, and the simple made wise. Some of the wisest among the old heathens felt and acknowledged the need there was of a revelation from heaven; and heathens of the present day acknowledge the same thing. A Hindoo Fakeer, who was a brahmun goroo, being lately asked by one of his disciples, who had heard a missionary

Balasore, whether he could make known to him the living and only God; answered, "We know there is one living God, besides Kreshnoo, Seeb, and Ram; but we do not know his way." The disciple replied, "Come to the Sahib, Fakeer; he will tell you of the God of heaven, whose way he knows."

2. *The necessity of divine revelation will farther appear, if we consider its relation to faith.*

Supposing mankind to be in a guilty and perishing condition, and that *God so loved the world as to give his only begotton Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;* a revelation from heaven was necessary as the ground of faith. *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God:* without revelation, therefore, there would be no faith, and so no salvation.

Both revelation and faith may, however, exist in widely different *degrees.* Revelation was first given in obscure intimations, afterwards in types and shadows, in promises and in prophecies; and under each it was the office of faith to keep pace with it. The faith of Abel and that of Paul, though as to their nature and object the same, yet, as to degree, must have been widely different, on account of the difference of the degrees of divine revelation which each possessed. Revelation, like the shining light, *shone more and more unto the perfect day,* and such was the *path of the just,* which corresponded with it.

From these remarks, we may see the force of such passages as the following: *He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as to his judgments, they have not known them, Praise ye the Lord.—What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there in circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.—At that time ye were without Christ, (being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise,) having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime ago were far off are made nigh, by the blood of Christ.*

We may also learn, from these remarks, to make allowance for the small degrees of faith where the light of revelation has been but

little known. It is not for us to say how small a portion of divine truth may irradiate the mind, nor by what means the Holy Spirit may impart it. According to the ordinary way of the divine proceeding under the gospel, it may be asked, *How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?* But this has not been the uniform method of the divine proceeding from the beginning. Previously to the time of Moses, there was no *written* revelation, and till the coming of Christ, no ordinance for *preaching* the word. No missionaries till then were sent among the heathen. Good men under the Old Testament stood on much lower ground than those under the New Testament. Cornelius, the Roman centurion, being stationed in Judea, learned enough of the God of Israel, to be *just and devout, giving much alms to the people, and praying to God alway;* and before he had heard of Jesus being the Messiah, his prayers and his alms were approved of God. Yet the words spoken to him by Peter were those by which he *was saved:* a proof this, not of there being another way of acceptance with God than that which the gospel reveals, nor of its being possible without faith to please God; but that faith may exist while as yet there is no explicit revelation of the Saviour. Finally: It is not for us to say what may be effected in an extraordinary way upon the minds of men. A ray of divine revelation shot athwart the darkness of Paganism, into the minds of the eastern Magi, and led them to worship the new-born Saviour.

I am affectionately yours,

A. F.

LETTER VI.

ON THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

My Dear Brother,

In my last, I endeavoured to show the necessity of a divine revelation. In this, I shall *offer evidence of the Bible being written by inspiration of God, so as to answer to this necessity.* It is certain, that those who wrote the books which compose the Old and New Testaments profess to have been divinely inspired. *The Spirit of God spake by me, and his word was in my tongue: the God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me.—The Lord spake unto Moses saying, &c.—Thus saith the Lord.—All scripture is given by inspiration of God.—Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.—The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* We must, therefore either admit these writings to be the word of God, or consider them as mere imposture. To pretend to "venerate them as authentic records of the dispensation of God," and yet deny their inspiration is absurd: it is believing the writers in what they say of other subjects, and disbelieving them in what they say of themselves. If their writings be not what they profess them to be, they are imposture, and deserve to be rejected. There is no consistent medium between faith and unbelief.

But, though all scripture is given by inspiration of God, it does not follow that it is so in the *same sense* and *degree.* It required one degree of inspiration to foretel future events, and another to narrate facts which fell under the writer's knowledge. The one required less exercise of his own judgment, the other more. Inspiration in the latter case, might be little more than a divine su-

perintendence, preserving him from error, and from other defects and faults, to which ordinary historians are subject. Divine inspiration, of whatever kind or degree, must have *carried in it its own evidence to the party*, or he could not with propriety have declared, *Thus saith the Lord*—and *The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* And it appears in some cases, to have been *equally evident to those who were present.* Thus, when the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, and he foretold the overthrow of the Moabites and Ammonites, Jehoshaphat and the people appear to have been as certain that it was by inspiration of God, as he himself was; and therefore fell before the Lord and worshipped. 2 Chron. xx.

The only question is, whether that which was evident to them *can be so to us, at this distance of time and place; if not in the same degree, yet with sufficient certainty to warrant our unreserved dependance upon it.* Some of the principal grounds on which the affirmative may be maintained, I conceive to be the following: the truth of the things contained in the sacred writings, their consistency, their perfection, their pungency, and their utility. Let us review these particulars.

1. The *truth* of the things contained in the sacred writings. It requires that a book professing to be a revelation from God should contain truth, and nothing but truth: such particularly must be its history, its prophecies, its miracles, and its doctrines. Now, as the scriptures abound with these, if they be untrue, it can be no difficult undertaking to prove them so. The facts being stated, with the evidence accompanying them, it lies upon those who disbelieve them to show cause. It certainly has not been for want of adversaries, nor of adversaries of talent, that this work has never been accomplished. How is it that out of all those who have written against the Bible, not an individual has soberly and modestly undertaken to answer the evidence which has been adduced for the veracity of its history, the fulfilment of its prophecies, the reality of its miracles, and the purity and consistency of its doctrines? Instead of this, many of them have meanly pretended to believe the Bible, while yet they have been deceitfully undermining it; and those who have avowed their hostility, have commonly dealt in

ridicule, rather than in reason. Verily, it is to the honour of the Bible to have such men for its adversaries.

2. Their *consistency*. A book written by more than thirty men, of different talents and stations in life, living in different ages, the greater part of whom, therefore, could have no communication with each other, must, had it not been written under the inspiration of God, have been full of contradictions. Let any other production be named which has preserved a consistency under such circumstances. To suppose a succession of writings, the work of designing impostors, or at least of weak-headed fanatics, capable of maintaining that harmony which is apparent in the sacred scriptures, is no less absurd than the notion of Epicurus, that the world was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, without a designing cause. Great as are the differences between Jews and Christians, there is none between their sacred writings. The Old and New Testaments are dictated by one and the same spirit. Paul was hated by his unbelieving countrymen, and treated as an apostate from the religion of his ancestors; but he was not an apostate. *I thank God* says he to Timothy, *whom I serve* FROM MY FOREFATHERS. He speaks also of the *same faith* which was in Timothy, as having dwelt first in his grandmother Lois, and then in his mother Eunice; the first of whom lived and died under the former dispensation. The same God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, in the last days spoke unto us by his Son. Consistency, it is true, may not in every instance be a test of truth; since error and falsehood may, in some particulars, be made to agree: but in a subject whose bearings are multifarious and minute, they cannot escape detection: nothing but truth in such cases will be found consistent throughout.

3. Their *perfection*. If the Bible be of God, perfection must be one of its properties; for *He is a rock, and his work is perfect*. This property, however, belongs to it, not as having been begun and ended at once. This, the work of creation was not: each day had its proper work; which, on review, was pronounced very good, and all together, when finished, formed a glorious whole. Such was the work of inspiration; the sacred scriptures

were upwards of fifteen hundred years from their commencement to their completion; but, being completed they form a whole, and every part of them is very good. There is this peculiar property belonging to the sacred scriptures, that if you are in possession of only a single book, you may generally learn from it the leading principles which run through all the rest. The strong language of David concerning the sacred scriptures, such as their being *more to be desired than thousands of gold and silver; sweeter than honey and the honey-comb*; and the like could have reference to little more than the Pentateuch of Moses. Even a leaf from the sacred oracles, would, in innumerable instances, teach him that should find it, and read it with a humble mind, the way to everlasting life: and this, not as possessing any thing like a charm, but as containing principles, which, if understood and followed, will lead the inquirer to God.

4. Their *pungency*. There is nothing in the sacred scriptures to gratify an idle curiosity; but much that commends itself to the conscience, and that interests the heart. They are a mirror, into which he that seriously looks must, in a greater or less degree, see his own likeness, and discover what kind of character he is. That which was said of Jesus by the Samaritan woman, might be said of them in thousands of instances: *He told me all that ever I did.* They are *the words of the wise which are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.* They not only prick the sinner in his heart, but stick so fast that he is incapable of extracting them. It has been remarked, that they who heard the preaching of the apostles were generally moved by it; either to repent and be converted, or to oppose the truth with bitter resentment. Their doctrine was a savour of life unto life in them that believed, and of death unto death in them that resisted. Surely, if we preached more in the spirit and power of the apostles, the effects of our ministry would more resemble theirs, and our hearers would not be able to sit year after year easy in their sins. *The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword; piercing even to the dividing assunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* If our preaching be but little

adapted to produce these effects, surely it contains but little of the word of God.

5. Their *utility*. There is much in the sacred scriptures that is entertaining and pleasing to the ingenious, and more to console the sorrowful: it was not however to please, nor merely to comfort, but to *profit* us that they were written. That which is given by inspiration of God is PROFITABLE *for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* Unbelievers may declaim against the Bible; but universal experience proves, that, in respect of the present life only, they who believe it, and form their lives on its principles, are beyond all comparison, the best members of society; while they who disbelieve and traduce it are the worst. And if to this be added the life to come, it is no longer a subject of comparison, but of contrast: for the former ordinarily die in peace and hope; the latter, either blinded by insensibility, or if awakened to reflection, in fearful forebodings of the wrath to come.

I shall conclude this letter with a few remarks on the *properties* and *tendencies* ascribed to the sacred scriptures in the nineteenth Psalm. Having declared the glory of God as manifested by his works, the writer proceeds to exhibit another medium of the divine glory; less magnificent, but more suited to the cases of sinful men; namely his word. The *law*, the *testimony*, the *statutes*, the *commandments*, the *fear*, and the *judgments* of the Lord are but different names given to the scriptures.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.—The book of nature declares the *eternal power and Godhead* of the Creator; but that of scripture represents his whole character; not only as the Creator, but as the Moral Governor and Saviour of men Hence it is *able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus.*

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.—The opinions of the greatest men, formed merely from the works of nature, are full of uncertainty, and but ill adapted to instruct the illiterate part of mankind in their best interests; but the sacred

scriptures contain the true sayings of God, which may be safely depended upon.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.—The principles inculcated in the sacred scriptures accord with the nature and fitness of things. That which they require approves itself to the conscience ; and that which they teach though foolishness in the account of unbelievers, is, to those who understand and believe it, the wisdom of God. This property gives joy to every upright mind ; for the friends of righteousness must needs rejoice in that which is right.

The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes.—Their freedom from every mixture of corruption renders them fit to illuminate the mind, and cheer the heart. Wearied with the discordant opinions of men, we turn to the scriptures, and, like Jonathan on tasting the honey, our eyes are enlightened.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.—The worship of God as taught in the sacred scriptures, is chaste and uncorrupt ; and therefore shall continue when idolatry, and every abomination which has passed under the name of religion, shall be no more.

The judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.—The sacred scriptures contain the decisions of the Judge of all both as to things and characters, from which there is no appeal ; nor is it fit there should be ; seeing they are not only formed in wisdom, but perfectly accord with truth and equity.

More to be desired are they than gold ; yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb.—There is a rich, a valuable, I might say an invaluable quality in these writings, which is not to be found in any other ; and which so interests the heart, that the things most valued in the world lose all their attractions in comparison of it.

Moreover, by them is thy servant warned ; and in keeping of them there is great reward.—They are adapted, at the same time, to preserve us from evil, and to lead us in the good and the right way ; and, as we follow it, yield inexpressible satisfaction. If, in reading these holy oracles, we make the proper use of them, we shall, according to the remaining verses in the Psalm, perceive

that our errors are innumerable ; shall feel the need of keeping grace to preserve us even from the worst of crimes ; and shall aspire to a conformity in our words and thoughts to the will of God.

May the blessing of God attend the various attempts to translate and circulate the sacred scriptures! A few years ago a certain infidel braggadocio pretended to have gone through the wood, and cut down the trees ; which the priests, he said, might stick in again, but they would not grow ! And have the sacred scriptures been less in request since that time than they were before ? Rather have they not been much more so ? Infidelity, by overacting its part, has given itself a wound ; and its abettors, like Herod, have been eaten of worms, and have died. But the word of the Lord has grown and been multiplied.

Affectionately yours,

A. F.

LETTER VII.

ON THE UNIFORM BEARING OF THE SCRIPTURES ON THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST.

My dear Brother,

In the two preceding letters, I have endeavoured to show the necessity of divine revelation, and to give evidence of the Bible's being written by inspiration of God, so as to answer to that necessity : in this, I shall add a few thoughts on its *uniform bearings on the person and work of Christ.*

We need not follow those who drag in Christ on all occasions. To suppose for instance, that all the Psalms of David refer to him, is to establish the gospel on the ruins of common sense. Still less need we see him prefigured by every thing in which a heated imagination may trace a resemblance. This were to go into a kind of spiritual Quixotism, finding a castle where others would only find a windmill. Nevertheless, the sacred scriptures are full of Christ, and uniformly lead to him. The holy book begins with an account of the creation of the world : *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* But they elsewhere inform us, that, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* Yea more, that not only were all things made *by him*, as the first cause, but *for him*, as the last end. The creation seems to have been designed as a theatre on which he should display his glory, particularly in the work of redemption. Surely it was in this view that he *rejoiced in the*

habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men.

The *history* contained in the sacred scriptures is that of the church or people of God; other nations are only introduced in an incidental manner, as being connected with them: and this people were formed for Christ. Him God appointed to be *heir of all things.* All that was done by the patriarchs and prophets, under the Old Testament, was preparatory to his kingdom. It was in his field that they laboured, and therefore his apostles *entered into their labours.* God's calling Abraham, and blessing and increasing him, had all along a reference to the kingdom of his Son. He was the principal seed in whom all the kindreds of the earth were to be blessed. Why did Melchizedek, on meeting Abraham when he returned from the slaughter of the kings bless him with so much heart? Was it not as knowing that he *had the promises*; especially that of the Messiah? Why is Esau's despising his birthright reckoned *profaneness*, but on account of its referring to something *sacred?* The promises made to Abraham's posterity chiefly related to things at a great distance; but Esau longed for something nearer at hand, and therefore sold his birthright for a present enjoyment. Why is the reproach which Moses preferred to the treasures of Egypt, called *the reproach of Christ*, but that Israel being in possession of the promise of Him, and Moses believing it, cast in his lot with them, though in a state of slavery? Were not these the *good things* to which he referred, in persuading Hobab to go with them? All that was done for Israel, from their going down into Egypt to their settlement in Canaan, and from thence to the coming of Christ, was in reference to him. The conquest of the seven nations was authorized, and even commanded by JeHoVaH, for the purpose of re-establishing his government in his own world, from which he had, in a manner, been driven by idolatry. It was setting up his standard with the design of ultimately subduing the world to the obedience of faith. What, but the promise of Christ as included in the covenant that God made with David, rendered it *all his salvation, and all his desire?* It was owing to the bearing which the Old Testament history had on the person and work of Christ, that Stephen and Paul, when

preaching him to the Jews, made use of it to introduce their subject. Acts vii. xiii.

The body of the Jewish *institutions* was but a shadow of good things to come, of which Christ was the substance. Their priests and prophets and kings were typical of him. Their sacrifices pointed to him, who *gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.* The manna on which they fed in the wilderness referred to him, as the *bread of God that should come down from heaven.* The rock, from whence the water flowed that followed them in their journeys is said to be *Christ,* as being typical of him. Their cities of refuge represent him as *the hope set before us.* The whole dispensation served as a foil, to set off the superior glory of his kingdom. The temple was but as the scaffolding to that which he would build, and the glory of which he would bear. The moral law exhibited right things, and the ceremonial law a shadow of good things ; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The Christian dispensation is to that of the Old Testament, as the jubilee to a state of captivity. It might be in reference to such things as these, that the Psalmist prayed, *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wonderful things out of thy law !*

Of the *prophecies* with which the scriptures abound, the person and work of Christ form the principal theme. *To him gave all the* PROPHETS WITNESS, either in what they wrote or spake. *The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of proyhecy.* From the first mention of the woman's seed, to his appearance in the flesh, the language of prophecy concerning him became more explicit and distinct. The blessing on *JeHoVaH the God of Shem,* seems to intimate designs of mercy towards his descendants. The promise to Abraham and his seed is more express. Abraham, understanding it as including the Messiah, believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness. He earnestly desired to see his day ; he saw it, and rejoiced. Jacob's prophecy is still more explict and distinct. He foretells his being of the tribe of Judah, and that under his reign the Gentiles should be gathered. After this, the house of David is specified, as that from which the Messiah should spring. The Psalms abound in predictions concerning

him. Isaiah tells us of his being miraculously born of a virgin; of his humble and gentle character, *not breaking the bruised reed, nor quenching the smoking flax;* of his sufferings, death, and everlasting kingdom, which implied his resurrection. (Acts xiii. 34.) Micah named the town of Bethlehem, as the place where he should be born. Zechariah mentioned the beasts on which he should make his public entry into Jerusalem. The spirit of inspiration in the prophets, is called *the spirit of Christ*, because it *testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.* But if the Old Testament had a uniform bearing on the person and work of Christ, much more the New. This is properly entitled, *The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* The one abounds with prophecies; the other relates their accomplishment. The ordinances of the former were prefigurative; those of the latter are commemorative. But both point to the same object. Every divine truth bears a relation to him: hence the doctrine of the gospel is called, *the truth as it is* IN JESUS. In the face of Jesus Christ we see the glory of the divine character in such a manner as we see it no where else. The evil nature of sin is manifested in his cross, and the lost condition of sinners in the price at which our redemption was obtained. Grace, mercy and peace are in him. The resurrection to eternal life is through his death. In him every precept finds its most powerful motive, and every promise its most powerful fulfilment. The Jews possessed the sacred scriptures of the Old Testament, and *searched them*,* thinking that in them they had eternal life; but they *would not come to him that they might have it.* What a picture does this present to us of multitudes in our own times. We possess both the Old and the New Testaments; and it is pleasing to see the zeal manifested of late in giving them circulation. All orders and degrees of men will unite in applauding them. But they overlook Christ, to whom they uniformly bear testimony; and, while thinking to obtain eternal life, will not come to him that they might have it.

Affectionately yours,

A. F.

* See Dr. Campbell's translation of John v. 39, 40.

LETTER VIII.

ON THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD.

My dear Brother,

I NEED not say to you, that just views of the divine character lie at the foundation of all true religion. Without them it is impossible, in the nature of things, to love God, or to perceive the fitness of our being required to love him, or the evil of not loving him, or the necessity of such a Saviour and such a salvation as the gospel reveals. We may be terrified by the fear of the wrath to come, and delighted with the hope of escaping it through Christ; but if this terror and this hope have no respect to the character of God as holy, just, and good, there can be no hatred of sin *as sin*, nor love to God *as God*, and consequently no true religion. *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* God is a Spirit, and cannot be known by sense, nor by any means but those in which he has been pleased to manifest himself. These are his works and his word. Every thing that meets our eyes, or accosts our ears, in heaven or in earth, is full of his glory. *The invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*; so that, were there no other revelation of himself, this were sufficient to leave sinners *without excuse*. But, besides this silent mode of manifesting himself, God has displayed himself by his *word*. Even in a state of innocence, man was governed by the revealed will of his Creator; and the revelation of God, from first to last, manifests the glory of his perfections.

The perfections of God require to be distinguished into *natural* and *moral*: the former respect his greatness, the latter his good-

ness ; or, more particularly, the one refers to his infinite understanding, his almighty power, his eternity, immensity, omnipresence, immutability, &c. the other, to his purity, justice, faithfulness, goodness, or, in one word, to his holiness. The first are necessary to render him an object of respect, the last of love, and both together of holy fear. The natural perfections of God are principally manifested in the creation and providential government of the world ; his moral perfections, in the creation, moral government, and salvation of intelligent beings. The former are glorious as connected with the latter, but the latter are glorious in themselves. Power and knowledge, and every other attribute belonging to the greatness of God, could they be separated from his righteousness and goodness, would render him an object of dread, and not of love : but righteousness and goodness, whether connected with greatness or not, are lovely.

Correspondent with this is what we are taught of the *image* of God in the soul of man : it is partly natural and partly moral. The moral image of God, consisting in *righteousness and true holiness*, was effaced by sin ; but the natural image of God, consisting in his rational and immortal nature, was not. In this respect, man, though fallen, still retains his Creator's image, and therefore cannot be murdered or cursed without incurring his high displeasure. Gen. ix. 6. James iii. 9.

The same distinction is perceivable in the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. He *emptied* or *disrobed* himself; he laid aside his glory for a season : yet not his goodness, but his greatness : not his purity, justness, faithfulness, or holiness ; but the display of his eternity, supremacy, immensity, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence : becoming a mortal man, subject to his parents, supported by the ordinary aliments of life, and ascribing his doctrine and miracles to the Father. It was thus that, *being rich, he* BECAME POOR, *that, through his poverty, we might be made rich.* And this it is that accounts for the ascriptions given him after his exaltation : *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.* Each of these terms have respect to that glory of which

he had disrobed himself, and with which he was therefore worthy now to be doubly invested.

As it is not talent, but morality, that constitutes character among men, so it is not the natural, but the moral perfections of God, which properly constitute his character. Holiness is the glory of the divine nature. Thus, when he would show Moses his glory, he said, *I will make all my* GOODNESS *pass before thee.* Yet, as greatness illustrates goodness among men, so does the greatness of God illustrate his goodness. His being *the High and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity*, illustrates the holiness of his name, and the unexampled condescension of his nature towards the poor and contrite. It is by the union of these divine excellencies that he stands opposed to all the deities of the heathen. His greatest enemies have often confessed him to be the "Most High" and "Most Holy." Hence Moses could say, *Their rock is not as our Rock, our adversaries themselves being judges.*

The precepts, prohibitions, and promises of the divine law, are a mirror in which we may perceive the moral perfections of the Lawgiver. They each express his heart; or what he loves, and what he hates. They moreover show his goodness to his creatures, granting them every thing that would do them good, and withholding nothing but that which would prove their ruin. The sum of all his requirements was, love to God and one another. And, as his promises to the obedient would express his love of righteousness, so his threatenings against transgressors show his great abhorrence of sin. On no other principle can we acconnt for such tremendous curses being denounced, by a Being full of goodness, against the work of his hands. Moreover, to show that these are not mere words given out to deter mankind, without any design of carrying them into execution, but that, in all his threatenings of future punishment to the ungodly, he means what he says, he inflicts numerous and sore judgments upon his enemies, even in this world. In one instance, he destroyed, with the exception of a single family, the whole race of man which he had created. In many others, by war, by famine, by pestilence, and other means, his displeasure against sin has been expressed in almost every age. Yet has he never failed to maintain his character, as *the Lord, the Lord God,*

merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth. Often has he pardoned those who have sought his mercy; and even when the parties have not sought it, he has wrought for his great name's sake. These are a few of the expressions of the divine mind; but, as Job says, they are *but a part of his ways*, and exhibit only a part of his character. The only display of the divine perfections which can be denominated perfect, is in the salvation of sinners, through the obedience and death of his beloved Son. After all the preceding manifestations of his glory, it may be said, *No one hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* In his undertaking, every divine perfection meets and harmonizes. There were, in former ages, various displays of truth and righteousness, on the one hand, and of mercy and peace, on the other: but there does not appear to have been a point in which they could meet and be united. If one prevailed, the other receded, or gave place. It was thus at the flood, and at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha: truth and righteousness prevailed; but mercy and peace retired, leaving the transgressors to suffer. And thus, when Israel was pardoned at the intercession of Moses, mercy and peace prevailed; but justice was suspended. It was reserved for the only-begotten of the Father to unite them in the same instance. In him *mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*

When the appointed time was come, justice awoke and smote the Shepherd, that mercy might turn its hand towards the little ones. It is thus that every perfection in the divine nature, natural and moral, is declared; wisdom, and power, and faithfulness, and justice, and love, and mercy, all meet and blend their rays. God is *just, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus.* A greater honour is conferred on the divine law, both as to its precept and penalty, than is sufficient to counterbalance the utmost disgrace upon it, by man's rebellion; and a greater display afforded of the divine displeasure against sin, than if the whole world had suffered the reward of their deeds. And now, love to sinners, which wrought unsolicited in the gift of Christ, flows without any impediment towards all who come unto God by him.

The struggles of justice and mercy, and the triumphs of the latter, are very affectingly represented in Jeremiah iii. 19, &c. Hosea xi. 8. *But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land?—How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* In the first of these passages, it is intimated, that though God was disposed to show mercy, yet their conduct put his very perfections to the proof. In the last, we must conceive an offended father as having hold of his son with one hand, and holding up a rod in the other, making alternate appeals, first to his own compassion, then to the conscience of the offender. Justice requires him to be delivered over to punishment, to be made as Admah, and set for an example as Zeboim. But mercy pleads in arrest ofjudgment, and overcomes. To such a case as this, the divine conduct towards Israel might be compared; but all this mercy, and all that followed, and all that shall yet follow, is through the atonement of Christ. His sacrifice has furnished the answers to these hard questions.

Affectionately yours,

A. F.

LETTER IX.

ON THE TRINITY; OR, ON THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT BEING ONE GOD.

My Dear Brother,

A SUBJECT so great and so much above our comprehension as this is, requires to be treated with trembling. Every thing that we can think or say, concerning the ever blessed God, requires the greatest modesty, fear, and reverence. Were I to hear two persons engaged in a warm contest upon the subject, I should fear for them both. One might in the main be in the right, and the other in the wrong: but if many words were used, they might both be expected to incur the reproof of the Almighty: *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge.*

The people of Israel were forbidden to break through the bounds which were set for them, and to gaze on the visible glory of Jehovah. The Bethshemites, for looking into the ark, were smitten with death. Such jugdments may not befal us in these days; but we may expect others, more to be dreaded. As the gospel is a spiritual dispensation, its judgments, as well as its blessings, are chiefly spiritual. Where men have employed themselves in curiously prying into things too high for them, they have ordinarily been smitten with a blast upon their minds, and upon their ministry.

There is a greater importance in the doctrine of the Trinity than commonly appears, on a superficial inspection of it; chiefly perhaps on account of its affecting our views of the doctrine of the person and work of Christ; which doctrine, being the foundation on which

the church is built, cannot be removed without the utmost danger to the building.

It is a subject of pure revelation. If the doctrine be not taught in the oracles of God, we have nothing to do with it; but if it be, whether we can comprehend it or not, we are required humbly to believe it, and to endeavour to understand so much as God has revealed concerning it. We are not required to understand *how* three are one, for this is not revealed. If we do not consider the Father, Son, and Spirit, as being both three and one *in the same sense*, which certainly we do not, we do not believe a contradiction. We may leave speculating minds to lose themselves and others in a labyrinth of conceits, while we learn what is revealed, and rest contented with it.

In believing three divine persons in one essence, I do not mean that the distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is the same as that between three human persons; but neither is there any other term that answers to the scriptural idea; and since Christ is said to be *the express image of his Father's person*, I see nothing objectionable in using this.

The doctrine was certainly less explicitly revealed in the Old Testament, than it is in the New. When the Messiah came, it was expected that he would tell us all things. If the degree in which the doctrine was made known in the Old Testament bears a proportion to that of other important truths, it is sufficient. From the beginning of the creation the name of God is represented under a plural form: with which agrees the moving of the Spirit of God upon the face of the waters; and all things being made by the Word, and without him nothing made that was made. The Angel of the Lord which appeared to Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, &c. in the form of man, was considered and treated by them as God, and received divine worship at their hands. In reference to this, I conceive, it is said in the New Testament, that, *being in the form of God, he thought it no usurpation to be as God.*

In the New Testament, the doctrine is more explicitly revealed; particularly in Christ's commission to his apostles, to baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In

the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, he invokes the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit to be with them. And John, in his First Epistle, introduces the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, as bearing witness to the gospel; or, that God had given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. If, in the first of these passages, the Son and Holy Spirit be considered as divine persons, and as one with the Father, both in nature and in the economy of redemption, there is a fitness in our being baptized into this individual name: but to be baptized into the name of God, a creature, and an energy, must be the height of incongruity. The next passage shows the importance of the doctrine to the existence and progress of vital godliness. It is not a subject of mere speculation, but one on which depends all the communications of grace and peace to sinful men; and it is remarkable, that they who reject it are seldom known to acknowledge any spiritual communion with God, but treat it as fanaticism. The last of these passages has been strongly opposed as an *interpolation*. It is not for me to decide this question, by a reference to ancient versions of the New Testament; but there are two or three considerations which, after all that I have seen on the other side, weigh with me in its favour. First: From the seventh verse being wanting in some copies and found in others, all that can be fairly inferred is, that there must have been either an interpolation by some copyist, or an omission by some other. The question is, Which is the most probable? If it is an omission in the copies where it is wanting, it might not have been from *design*, but from mere oversight, especially as the eighth verse begins so much like the seventh; whereas if it be an interpolation, no oversight can account for it, but it must have arisen from wicked, wilful imposture. To which of these suppositions will candour give its vote? Secondly: Supposing the omission or interpolation, whichever it was, to have arisen from design; which is the most probable, and the least likely to have escaped detection—that the Anti-Trinitarians should omit what was unfavourable to them, or that the Trinitarians should introduce what was favourable? An omission would escape detection seven times, where an interpolation would escape it once.

Thirdly: The connection of the passage is altogether in its favour. The phraseology is that of the Apostle John; so that if the words are not his, it must have been the most successful imitation of him that can be imagined. As it stands in our translation, there is evidently a gradation of ideas, forming a kind of climax of witnesses; namely, that of the three in heaven, of the three on earth, and the testimony which a believer has within himself. To leave out the first, were to weaken the passage and destroy its beauty. Besides, it is not the omission of the seventh verse only that is necessary, to make any thing like sense of the passage. The words *on earth*, in the eighth verse, must also be left out, if not the whole of the ninth verse, in which the *witness of God* is supposed to have been introduced; but which, if the seventh verse be left out had not been introduced. Those who are now for new-modelling the passage, leave out *some* of these, but not all; nor can they prove that those words which they do leave out were uniformly left out of even those copies in which the seventh verse is omitted. As the Father is allowed, on all hands to be a divine person, whatever proves the divinity and personality of the Son, proves a plurality of divine persons in the Godhead. I need not adduce the evidences of this truth: the sacred scriptures are full of them. Divine perfections are ordinarily ascribed to him, and divine worship is paid to him, both by angels and men. If Jesus Christ is not God, equal with the Father, Christianity must have tended to establish a system of idolatry, more dangerous, as being more plausible, than that which it came to destroy. The union of the divine and human natures, in the person of Christ is a subject on which the sacred writers delight to dwell; and so should we, for herein is the glory of the gospel. Unto us a *child is born;* and his name shall be called *the mighty God.* He was *born* in Bethlehem; yet his goings forth were *from of old*, from everlasting. He was made of the seed of David *according to the flesh*, and declared to be *the Son of God with power. Of whom* AS CONCERNING THE FLESH *Christ came, who is* OVER ALL GOD BLESSED FOR EVER, *Amen.* In his original nature, he is described as incapable of death, and as taking flesh and blood upon him to qualify himself for enduring it. Heb. ii. 14. He was the *Son of God*, yet *touched with a feel-*

ing of our infirmities; the *root* and the *offspring* of David. The sacred scriptures lay great stress on what Christ was antecedently to his assumption of human nature, and of the official character of a Mediator and Saviour. *The Word* WAS *with God, and the Word* WAS *God.—He who* WAS RICH, *for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. Who* BEING *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power,* &c.—*Who* BEING *in the form of God, thought it not robbery,* or usurpation, *to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.* If divine personality be not essential to Deity, distinct from all office capacity, and antecedent to it, what meaning is there in this language? An economical Trinity, or that which would not have been, but for the economy of redemption, is not the Trinity of the scriptures. It is not a Trinity of divine persons, but merely of offices personified; whereas Christ is distinguished from the Father, as the express image or character of his person, while yet in his pre-incarnate state.

The sacred scriptures lay great stress on the character of Christ, as *the Son of God.* It was this that formed the first link in the Christian profession, and was reckoned to draw after it the whole chain of evangelical truth. *I believe that Jesus Chist is the Son of God.* From this rises the great love of God in the gift of him: *God so loved the world as to give his* ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON. The condescension of his obedience: *Though he was a son, yet learned he obedience.* The efficacy of his blood: *The blood of Jesus Christ* HIS SON *cleanseth us from all sin.* The dignity of his priesthood: *We have a* GREAT *High Priest, Jesus the* SON OF GOD. The greatness of the sin of unbelief: *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the name of* THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD. The greatness of the sin of apostacy: *Who have trodden under foot* THE SON OF GOD. The incarnation resurrection, and exaltation, of Christ declared, but did not *constitute* him the Son of God; nor did any of his offices, to all which his Sonship was antecedent. God *sent* his Son into the world. This implies that he was his Son antecedently to his being

sent, as much as Christ's sending his disciples implies that they were his disciples before he sent them. The same may be said of the *Son of God being made of a woman, made under the law.* These terms no more express that which rendered him a Son, than his being *made flesh* expresses that which rendered him the Word. The Son of God was *manifested* to destroy the works of the devil ; he must therefore have been the Son of God antecedently to his being manifested in the flesh. I have heard it asserted that " Eternal generation is eternal nonsense." But whence does this appear ? Does it follow, that because a Son among men is inferior and posterior to his father, that it must be so with the Son of God ? If so, why should his saying that God was his own Father be considered as making himself *equal* with God ? Of the only-begotten Son it is not said he was, or will be, but he *is* in the bosom of the Father ; denoting the eternity and immutability of his character. There never was a point in duration in which God was without his Son : he *rejoiced always before him.* Bold assertions are not to be placed in opposition to revealed truth. In Christ's being called the Son of God there may be, for the assistance of our low conceptions, some reference to sonship among men ; but not sufficient to warrant us to reason from the one to the other. The sacred scriptures often ascribe the miracles of Christ, his sustaining the load of his sufferings, and his resurrection from the dead, to the power of the Father, or of the Holy Spirit, rather than to his own divinity. I have read in human writings, " But the divinity within supported him to bear." But I never met with such an idea in the sacred scriptures. They represent the Father as *upholding* his servant, his elect in whom his soul delighted : and as sending his angel to *strengthen* him in the conflict. While acting as the Father's servant, there was a fitness in his being supported by him, as well as his being in all things obedient to his will. But when the value, virtue, or efficacy of what he did and suffered, are touched upon, they are never ascribed either to the Father, or the Holy Spirit, but to himself. Such is the idea suggested by those fore-quoted passages. *Who* BEING *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he*

had BY HIMSELF *purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.—Ye are not redeemed by corruptible things, but by* THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST.—*The blood of* JESUS CHRIST HIS SON, *cleanseth us from all sin.* Much less is said in the sacred scriptures on the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit, than on those of the Son. The Holy Spirit not having become incarnate, it might be less necessary to guard his honours, and to warn men against thinking meanly of him. All judgment was committed to the Son, *because he was the Son of Man.* Yet there is enough said against *grieving* the Spirit, *blasphemy* against him, *lying* against him, *doing despite* to him, and *defiling his temples*, to make us tremble. In the economy of redemption it is the office of the Holy Spirit, not to exhibit himself, but to *take of the things of Christ, and show them to us.* He is the great spring head of all the good that is in the world ; but in producing it, he himself appears not. We are no otherwise conscious of its influences than by their effects. He is a wind which bloweth where it listeth : we hear the sound, and feel the effects ; but know nothing more of it.

The Holy Spirit is not the grand object of ministerial exhibition ; but Christ, in his person, work, and offices. When Philip went down to Samaria, it was not to preach *God the Holy Spirit* unto them, but to preach *Christ* unto them. While this was done, the Holy Spirit gave testimony to the word of his grace, and rendered it effectual. The more sensible we are, both as ministers and Christians, of our entire dependence on the Holy Spirit's influences, the better : but if we make them the grand theme of our ministry, we shall do that which he himself avoids, and so shall counteract his operations. The attempts to reduce the Holy Spirit to a mere property, or *energy* of the Deity arise from much the same source as the attempts to prove the inferiority and posteriority of Christ as the Son of God ; namely, reasoning from things human to things divine. The Spirit of God is compared to the spirit of man ; and, as the latter is not a person distinguishable from man, so it has been said, the former cannot be a person distinguishable from God the Father. But the design of the Apostle, in 1 Cor. ii. 11. was not to represent the Spirit of God as resembling the spirit of man, *in respect of his subsistence*, but of his

knowledge ; and it is presumptuous to reason from it on a subject that we cannot understand. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you, and

Your affectionate Brother,

A. F.

THOUGHTS

ON

PREACHING;

IN LETTERS TO A YOUNG MINISTER.

LETTER I.

ON EXPOUNDING THE SCRIPTURES.

My dear Brother,

As you have expressed a wish for a few of my thoughts on your principal work as a Christian minister, I will endeavour to comply with your request, persuaded that what I write will be read with candour and seriousness.

The work in which you are engaged is of great importance. To declare the whole counsel of God in such a way as to save yourself and them that hear you; or, if they are not saved, to be pure from their blood, is no small matter. The character of the preaching in an age, contributes, more than most other things to give a character to the Christians of that age. A great and solemn trust, therefore, is reposed in us, of which we must shortly give an account.

The work of a Christian minister, as it respects the pulpit, may be distinguished into two general branches; namely, expounding *the scriptures, and discoursing on divine subjects.* In this letter I shall offer a few remarks on the former.

I have found it not a little useful, both to myself and to the people, to appropriate one part of every Lord's-day to the *exposition* of a chapter, or part of a chapter, in the sacred writings. In this way, during the last eighteen years, I have gone over the greater part of the Old Testament, and some books in the New. It is advantageous to a minister to feel himself necessitated, as it were, to understand every part of scripture, in order so explain it to the people. It is also advantageous to a people, that what they hear should come directly from the word of God, and that they should be led to see the scope and connexion of the sacred writers. For want of this, a great number of scripture passages are misunderstood and misapplied. In going over a book, I have frequently been struck with surprise, in meeting with texts, which, as they had always occurred to me, I had understood in a sense utterly foreign from what manifestly appeared to be their meaning when viewed *in connexion with the context.*

The great thing necessary for expounding the scriptures, is, *to enter into their true meaning.* We may read them, and talk about them again and again, without imparting any light concerning them. If the hearer, when you have done, understand no more of that part of scripture than he did before, your labour is lost. Yet this is commonly the case with those attempts at expounding which consist of little else than comparing parallel passages, or, by the help of a concordance, tracing the use of the same word in other places, going from text to text till both the preacher and the people are wearied and lost. This is troubling the scriptures, rather than expounding them. If I were to open a chest of oranges among my friends, and, in order to ascertain their quality, were to hold up one, and lay it down, then hold up another, and say, This is like the last ; then a third, a forth, a fifth, and so on till I came to the bottom of the chest, saying of each, it is like the other ; of what account would it be ? The company would doubtless be weary, and had much rather have tasted two or three of them.

The scope of the sacred writers is of greater importance in understanding the scriptures, than the most critical examination of terms, or the most laborious comparison of the use of them in

different places. For want of attending to this, not only particular passages, but whole chapters are frequently misunderstood. The reasonings of both Christ and his apostles frequently proceed, not upon what is true in fact, but merely in the estimation of the parties addressed: that is to say, they reason with them *on their own principles*. It was not true that Simon the Pharisee was a *little* sinner, nor a *forgiven* sinner, nor that he *loved Christ a little*: but he thought thus of himself, and upon these principles Christ reasoned with him. It was not true that the Pharisees were just men, and needed no repentance: but such were their thoughts of themselves, and Christ suggested, that therefore they had no need of him; for that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. Finally it was not true that the Pharisees who murmured at Christ's receiving publicans and sinners, had never, like the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness, gone astray; nor that, like the elder son they had served God, and never at any time transgressed his commandment; nor that all which God had was theirs: but such were their own views, and Christ reasons with them accordingly. It is as if he had said, 'Be it so, that you are righteous and happy; yet why should you murmur at the return of these poor sinners?' Now, to mistake the *principle* on which such reasonings proceed, is to lose all the benefit of them, and to fall into many errors.

Moreover, To enter into the true meaning of the scriptures, it is absolutely necessary that we *drink into the spirit* of the writers. This is the greatest of all accomplishments. I do not mean that you are to expect a spirit of extraordinary inspiration; but that of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. It is impossible to enter into the sentiments of any great writer, without a kindred mind. Who but a Pope, or a Cowper, could have translated Homer; and who can explain the oracles of God, but he who, in a measure, drinks into the same spirit? Every Christian knows by experience, that in a spiritual frame of mind, he can understand more of the scriptures in an hour, than he can at other times, with the utmost application, in a week. It is by an *unction from the Holy One* that we know all things.

I may add, there are some things, which, when known, wonderfully facilitate the knowledge of other things. It is thus that a view of the glory of the divine character and government opens the door to the whole mistery of redemption. It is thus also that a lively faith in the sufferings of Christ, and the glory arising out of them, is a key which unlocks a large part of the sacred oracles. While the disciples remained ignorant of his death, they knew but little of the scriptures; but, having learned the design of this great event, a flood of light poured in upon them, and the Old Testament became plain and deeply interesting.

A humble sense of our own ignorance, and of our entire dependance upon God, has also a great influence on our coming at the true meaning of his word. There are few things which tend more to blind the mind than a conceit of our own powers. Hence we perceive the justness of such language as the following: *Proud, knowing nothing.—He that thinketh he knoweth any thing, knoweth nothing as he ought to know.—If any man will be wise, let him first become a fool, that he may be wise.*

To understand the scriptures in such a manner as profitably to expound them, it is necessary to be conversant with them in private; and to mix, not only faith, but the prayer of faith, with what we read. There is a great difference between reading the scriptures *as a student*, in order to find something to say to the people, and reading them *as a Christian*, with a view to get good from them to one's own soul. That which is gained in the last of these ways is, beyond all comparison, of the greatest use, both to ourselves and others. That which we communicate will freeze upon our lips, unless we have first applied it to ourselves; or, to use the language of scripture, *tasted, felt, and handled the word of life.*

When I have read a psalm or chapter, which I mean to expound, and have endeavoured to understand it, I have commonly thought it right to consult the best expositors I could obtain, trying and comparing my ideas with theirs. Hereby I have generally obtained some interesting thought which had not occurred to me, and sometimes have seen reason to retract what before appeared to me to be the meaning. But to go first to expositors, is to preclude the exercise of your own judgment; and, after all, that

which is furnished by the labours of another, though equally good in itself, will be far less interesting to us than that which is the result of our own application,

I will only add, that I have found it not a little useful to keep a book in which I write down all my expository notes, which, though illegible to others, yet answer two purposes to myself: first, by looking them over before I go into the pulpit, I have a clear understanding of every sentence: and, secondly, I can have recourse to them on future occasions.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

ON SERMONS, AND THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF THEM.

My Dear Brother,

Though expounding the scriptures be an important part of the public work of a minister, yet it is not the whole of it. There is a great variety of *subjects*, both in doctrinal and practical religion, which require to be illustrated, established, and improved: which cannot be done in an exposition. Discourses of this kind are properly called *sermons*.

You request me to give you my thoughts on this part of your work, somewhat more particularly. I will endeavour to do so, by considering what must be the *matter* and the *manner* of preaching, if we wish to do good to the souls of men. I may fill this letter, and possibly two or three more, on the former, as being by far of the greatest importance.

Unless the subject-matter of your preaching be truly evangelical, you had better be any thing than a minister. When the apostle speaks of a necessity being laid upon him to preach the gospel, he might mean that he was not at liberty to relinquish his work in favour of ease, or honour, or any other worldly object; but he was not bound to preach merely, but to preach that doctrine which had been delivered unto him. The same may be said of us; wo unto us if we preach not the gospel!

It may seem a very easy thing, with the Bible in our hands, to learn the truth clear of all impure mixtures, and to make it the subject of our ministry. But it is not so. We talk much of thinking and judging for ourselves; but who can justly pretend to be free from the influences which surround him, especially in ear-

ly life? We are insensibly, and almost irresistibly assimilated by the books we read, and the company with which we associate; and the principles current in our age and connexions will ordinarily influence our minds. Nor is the danger solely from without: we are *slow of heart* to believe in a doctrine so holy and divine, and prone to deviate at every point. If, therefore, we were wholly to think for ourselves, that were no security for our keeping to the mind of Christ.

I mention these things; not to deter you from either reading or thinking for yourself; but rather to inculcate the necessity of prayer for divine guidance, and a close adherence to the scriptures. Though we must think for ourselves, we must not depend upon ourselves, but, as little children learn at the feet of our Saviour.

If you look over the New Testament, you will find the subject-matter of your preaching briefly, yet fully expressed, in such language as the following: *Preach* THE WORD.—*Preach* THE GOSPEL.—*Preach the gospel to every creature.—Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that* REPENTANCE AND REMISSION OF SINS *should be preached in his name, among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.—I declare unto you* THE GOSPEL *which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.—We preach* CHRIST CRUCIFIED.—*I am determined to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.—This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.—We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech men by us, we pray them in Christ's stead, saying, Be ye reconciled unto God.—For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. I have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks,* REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD, AND FAITH TOWARD OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Such, my brother, is the concurrent language of the New Testament. Every one of the foregoing passages contains an epitomé of the gospel ministry. You will not expect me to expatiate upon their various connexions: I may, however, notice three or four particulars, which follow from them.

First: *In every sermon we should have an errand; and one of such importance, that if it be received, or complied with, it will issue in eternal salvation.*—I say nothing of those preachers who profess to go into the pulpit without an errand, and to depend upon the Holy Spirit to furnish them with one at the time. I write not for them; but for such as make a point of thinking before they attempt to preach. Even of these I have heard some, who in studying their texts have appeared to me to have no other object in view than to find something to say, in order to fill up the time. This, however, is not preaching: but merely talking about good things. Such ministers, though they think of something beforehand, yet appear, to me, to resemble Ahimaaz, who ran without tidings. I have also heard many an ingenious discourse, in which I could not but admire the talents of the preacher; but his only object appeared to be to correct the grosser vices, and to form the manners of his audience, so as to render them useful members of civil society. Such ministers have an errand; but not of such importance as to *save* those who receive it, which sufficiently proves that it is not *the gospel.*

In preparing for the pulpit, it would be well to reflect in some such manner as this: 'I am expected to preach, it may be, to some hundreds of people, some of whom may come several miles to hear; and what have I to say to them? Is it for me to sit here studying a text, merely to find something to say, to fill up the hour? I may do this without imparting any useful instruction, without commending myself to any man's conscience, and without winning, or even aiming to win, one soul to Christ. It is possible there may be in the audience a poor miserable creature, labouring under the load of a guilty conscience. If he depart without being told how to obtain rest for his soul, what may be the consequence? Or, it may be, some stranger may be there, who has never heard the way of salvation in his life. If he should depart without hear-

ing it now, and should die before another opportunity occurs, how shall I meet him at the bar of God? Possibly, some one of my constant hearers may die in the following week; and is there nothing I should wish to say to him before his departure? It may be that I myself may die before another Lord's day: this may be the last time that I shall ascend the pulpit; and have I no important testimony to leave with the people of my care?'

Secondly: *Every sermon should contain a portion of the doctrine of salvation by the death of Christ.*—If there be any meaning in the foregoing passages, this is emphatically called THE GOSPEL. A sermon, therefore, in which this doctrine has not a place, and I might add a prominent place, cannot be *a gospel sermon.* It may be ingenious, it may be eloquent: but a want of the doctrine of the cross is a defect which no pulpit excellence can supply.

Far be it from me to encourage that fastidious humour manifested by some hearers, who object to a sermon unless the cross of Christ be the *immediate and direct* topic of discourse. There is a rich variety in the sacred writings, and so there ought to be in our ministrations. There are various important truths *supposed*, by this great doctrine; and these require to be illustrated and established. There are various branches pertaining to it, which require to be distinctly considered; various *consequences* arising from it, which require to be pointed out; various *duties* corresponding with it, which require to be inculcated; and various *evils* inimical to it, which may require to be exposed. All I mean to say is, that as there is a *relation* between these subjects and the doctrine of the cross, if we would introduce them in a truly evangelical manner, it requires to be *in that relation.* I may establish the moral character and government of God; the holiness, justice, goodness, and perpetual obligation of the law; the evil of sin; and the exposedness of the sinner to endless punishment: but if I have any other end in view than by convincing him of his lost condition, to make him feel the need of a Saviour, I cannot be said to have preached *the gospel*; nor is my reasoning, however forcible, likely to produce any good effect. I may be very pointed in pressing the practical parts of religion, and in reproving the sins of the times; but if I enforce the one, or inveigh against the oth-

er, on any other than evangelical principles, I, in so doing, preach not the gospel. All scriptural preaching is practical: but when practice is enforced in opposition to doctrine, or even to the neglect of it, it becomes anti-scriptural. The apostolic precept runs thus: *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering* AND DOCTRINE.

Thirdly: *In preaching the gospel, we must not imitate the* ORATOR, *whose attention is taken up with his performance; but rather the* HERALD, *whose object is to publish, or proclaim, good tidings.*—There is, in the one, an earnestness, a fulness of heart, a mind so interested in the subject as to be inattentive to other things, which is not in the other. *We believe, and therefore speak.* The emphatical meaning of the terms, κηρυσσω, ευαγγελιζω, *to preach,* and *preach the gospel,* is noticeable in the account given of the ministry of John the Baptist. *The law and the prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is* PREACHED, *and every man presseth into it.* Moses and the prophets spake of things *at a distance;* but John did more than prophesy: his was the voice of one that CRIED; he announced the fulfilment of what had been foretold, proclaiming the Messiah as being *among* them, and his kingdom as *at hand.* He opened the door of salvation, and great numbers pressed in!

Fourthly: *Though the doctrine of reconciliation by the blood of Christ forms the ground-work of the gospel embassy, yet it belongs to the work of the ministry, not merely to declare that truth, but to accompany it with earnest calls, and pressing invitations to sinners to receive it, together with the most solemn warnings and threatenings to unbelivers who shall continue to reject it.*—The preaching of both John and Christ is, indeed, distinguished from the calls to repentance and faith which they addressed to their hearers, as being the ground on which they rested; but the latter were no less essential to their work than the former. John came *preaching* in the wilderness of Judea, *and* saying, Repent ye, &c. After John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, *preaching* the gospel of the kingdom of God, *and* saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand—repent ye, and believe the gospel. And thus the apostles explain the ministry of reconciliation as

comprehending not only a declaration of the doctrine, but the persuading of men, *beseeching them to be reconciled to God.* 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

There is nothing in all this which clashes with the most entire dependance on the influence of the Holy Spirit, to give success to our ministry. Though we invite men, yet it is not on their pliability that we must rest our hopes, but on the power and promise of God. These are a part of the weapons of our warfare; but it is through God that they become mighty to the pulling down of strong holds.

Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

My dear Brother,

You have requested my thoughts on the composition of a sermon. There are several publications on this subject well worthy of your notice. If what I may offer have any peculiar claim to your attention, it will be on account of its familiarity.

The form, or manner, in which a sermon is composed and delivered is of some importance, inasmuch as it influences the attention, and renders the matter delivered more or less easy of being comprehended and retained.

In general, I do not think a minister of Jesus Christ should aim at fine composition for the pulpit. We ought to use sound speech and good sense: but if we aspire after great elegance of expression, or become very exact in the formation of our periods, though we may amuse and please the ears of a few, we shall not profit the many, and consequently shall not answer the great end of our ministry. Illiterate hearers may be very poor *judges* of preaching; yet the effect which it produces upon them is the best criterion of its real excellence.

A considerable part of the ministerial gift consists in fruitfulness of invention; but that which greatly aids in the composition and delivery of a sermon is spirituality of mind. Without this, we shall get no good ourselves, and be likely to do but little good to others. The first thing, therefore, before we sit down to study, should be to draw near to God in prayer. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

When a passage of scripture is fixed on as the ground of a sermon, it is necessary to read it in connexion with the context, and endeavour by your own judgment to gain a clear idea of its genuine meaning. Having formed your own judgment, I would then advise you to consult expositors, who may throw additional light upon it, or give a different sense to it; and if the sense which they give appear to have evidence in its favour, you must relinquish your own. Be satisfied, at all events, that you have the mind of the Holy Spirit, before you proceed.

In the next place, having determined on the meaning of the text, it is necessary to examine the force of each word, or term of importance in it. This may be done by examining the use of the same terms in other places of scripture, by the help of a concordance: but here a good judgment of your own is required, that you may select a few out of the many parallel texts, which will really illustrate that on which you have fixed. Some of the worst sermons are made out of a concordance, being a mere collection of similar sounds, which, instead of throwing light upon the subject, only throw it into confusion.

The force of words or terms of importance may also be examined to great advantage by a judicious use of *contrast*. Place all the important terms of your text, one at a time, in contrast with other things; or examine to what ideas they stand opposed. For example, let your text be Psa. cxlv. 16. *Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.* Begin with the term OPENEST. Thou *openest* thy hand. What an idea does this convey of the *paternal goodness* of the great Father of his creation. How opposite to the conduct of many of his creatures one to another, whose hands and hearts are *shut!* What an idea also does it convey of the *ease* with which the wants of the whole creation are supplied! Let me pause a moment, and think of their wants. What a quantity of vegetable and animal food is daily consumed in one town: what a quantity in a large city, like London: what a quantity in a nation: in the whole world. But *men* do not compose a hundredth part of *every living thing!* O what innumerable wants throughout all animate nature; in the earth, in the air, in the waters! Whence comes their supply? *Thou openest thy hand,*

and all are satisfied. And can all these wants be supplied by only the *opening of his hand?* What then must sin be, and salvation from it? That is a work of wonderful expense. God openeth his hand, and satisfieth all creation, but he must purchase the church *with his blood!* God is all-sufficient as to power, in the one case as well as in the other; but there are things relative to his moral conduct which he cannot do: he cannot deny himself. Here lies the great difficulty of salvation. In what a *variety of ways* are our wants supplied. The earth is fruitful, the air is full of life, the clouds empty themselves upon the earth, the sun pours forth its genial rays: but the operation of all these second causes is only *the opening of his hand!* Nay farther: look we to *instruments*, as well as means? Parents feed us in our childhood, and supply our youthful wants; ways are opened for our future subsistence; connexions are formed, which prove sources of comfort; friends are kind in seasons of extremity; supplies are presented from quarters that we never expected. What are all these but *the opening of his hand*? If his hand were shut, what a world would this be! The heavens brass, the earth iron; famine, pestilence, and death must follow! See Psalm civ. 27—29.

Next take up the pronoun THOU. You will infer from this, If *thou* openest thy hand, should I shut mine against my poor brother? This important sentiment will properly occupy the place of improvement, towards the close of the discourse.

Consider next the term HAND. There is a difference between the *hand* and the *heart*. God opens his hand, in the way of providence, towards his worst enemies. He gave Nebuchadnezzar all the kingdoms of the earth. But he opens his *heart* in the gospel of his Son. This is the best portion of the two. While we are thankful for the one, let us not rest satisfied in it: it is merely a *hand* portion. Rather let us pray with Jacob, to be blessed *indeed;* and that we might have a Joseph's portion; not only the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof, but *the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush!*

Proceed: *Thou* SATISFIEST THE DESIRE, &c. God, I see, does not give grudgingly. It seems to be a characteristic of the divine nature, both in the natural and moral world, to raise desires, not

with a view to disappoint, but to satisfy them. O what a consoling thought is this! If there be any desires in us which are not satisfied, it is through their being self-created ones, which is our own fault; or through artificial scarcity arising from men's luxury, which is the fault of our species. God raises no desires as our creator, but he gives enough to satisfy them; and none as our redeemer and sanctifier, but what shall be actually satisfied. O the wonderful munificence of GOD! How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!

Now, having examined the force of every term of importance, by contrasting it with the opposite idea or ideas, you will find yourself in possession of a number of interesting thoughts, which you may consider as so many recruits, and having noted them down as they occurred, your next business is to *arrange* them in order, or to give each thought that place in your discourse which it will occupy to the greatest advantage. Many sermons are a *mob* of ideas: they contain very good sentiments, but they have no object in view; so that the hearer is continually answering the preacher, 'Very true, very true; but what then? What is it you are aiming at? what is this to the purpose?' A preacher then, if he would interest a judicious hearer, must have an object at which he aims, and must never lose sight of it throughout his discourse. This is what writers on these subjects call *a unity of design:* and this is a matter of far greater importance than studying well-turned periods, or forming pretty expressions. It is this that nails the attention of an audience. *One thing at once* is a maxim in common life, by which the greatest men have made the greatest proficiency. Shun, therefore, a multiplicity of divisions and subdivisions. He who aims to say every thing in a single discourse, in effect says nothing. Avoid making a head or particular of every thought. Unity of design may be preserved consistently with various methods of division; but the thing itself is indispensable to good preaching.

The following reasons have induced me to hold this opinion: 1. The human mind is so formed as to delight in unity. To divide the attention is to weaken, if not destroy it. President Edwards's Sermons, though in some respects not proper for imita-

tion, yet, in this, are worthy of notice. They all hold up some one great leading truth; and that truth is the spirit of his text, and serves for the title of his sermon. Look over the table of contents to his *Thirty-three Sermons*, and you will find the title of each sermon throw an amazing light upon the text. The sentiment expressed in the title he calls the *doctrine* of the text; and all he says is to *illustrate*, *establish*, or *improve* it. It might be of use, if, in the composition of sermons, we were to oblige ourselves to give titles to them. Many of what are called sermons would be found to require three or four titles to answer to their contents; which at once proves that, properly speaking, they are not sermons.

2. It has been said, and I think justly, that *evidence* should constitute the body or substance of every doctrinal discourse. Evidence may be drawn from various sources; as scripture testimony, example, the reason of things, &c. but evidence always implies a leading truth to be proved. Where this is not the case, the preacher gives himself no opportunity of advancing evidence; consequently, his sermon, if it may be so called, will be without body, without substance, and will contain nothing that shall leave any strong impression upon a thinking mind. In opening a battery against a wall, you would not throw your balls at random, first at one place and then at another; but direct your whole force against a particular spot. In the one case, your labour would be thrown away; in the other, you are likely to make an effectual impression.

3. It is greatly assisting to *memory*, both with respect to the preacher and the hearer. Memory is exercised by the *relation* of one thing to another. Were you to attempt to remember seven different objects which bore no manner of relation to each other; such as *water*, *time*, *wisdom*, *fruit*, *contentment*, *fowls*, and *revenues*, you would find it almost impossible; but take seven objects, which, though different in nature, yet possess some point of unity which associates them in the mind, and the work is easy. Thus, *sun*, *moon*, *stars*, *earth*, *air*, *fire*, and *water* are readily remembered, being so many principal parts of the *one creation*.

4. I cannot so well satisfy my *conscience* unless I have some interesting truth to communicate, or some important duty to enforce. When I have been thinking of the approach of the Lord's-

day, the questions have occurred to my mind, What message have I to deliver to the people of my charge? What important doctrine to establish? What sin to expose? What duty to inculcate? What case to meet? What acknowledged truth to improve? The method frequently used seems to afford an answer to none of these questions; but is rather saying, None at all only I have a text of scripture, on the different parts of which I may say something that will fill up the time.

Divisions are either *topical*, *textual*, or *compound*. The first, or *topical* method, is to collect all your remarks upon a text, and reduce them to a point, like so many rays of light in a focus. In other words, ask yourself, *What important truth is it that the text contains, and which I feel impressed upon my own mind, and wish to impress upon that of the congregation?* And make this the topic of discourse.

After going over the passage before mentioned, as above, you could be at no loss to determine that the leading sentiment would be *The bounty of providence*. This is what the old divines called the *doctrine* of the text; and when they printed their discourses, this was the title of them.

But you may ask, 'What am I to do with this doctrine when I have found it? Am I to make no divisions, or subdivisions? Of what is my discourse to be composed?' Yes, there must be divisions, and perhaps subdivisions; but let them not be so many distinct subjects, which have no relation to each other, but *so many parts of a whole*. When I have a subject before me, I sometimes ask myself three questions: What is it? On what evidence does it rest? and, What does it concern me or any of the people, if it be true? The division of many subjects will therefore be, 1. Explain the doctrine. 2. Establish it. 3. Improve it.

Let us try the above subject on this plan, and see whether we cannot find a place, under one or other of these heads, for all the foregoing thoughts, which occurred spontaneously on looking over the terms; and perhaps, as we go along, others no less interesting may occur.

Introduction.—However men have been in the dark respecting God, it has not been for want of evidence. He is not far

from every one of us; for in him we live and move and have our being. Creation is full of God.

There is something in this passage wonderfully sublime. It expresses a great truth in the most simple language. It represents the great Creator as the Father of his creation, encompassed round by an innumerable family, whose eyes all wait on him for daily food; while he, with paternal goodness, opens his bounteous hand, and satisfies their various wants.

The subject which invites our attention is *The bounty of providence.* In discoursing on it, I shall offer some remarks by way of explanation; notice the evidence on which it rests; and then improve the subject.

I. Offer some remarks upon the subject by way of EXPLANATION.

There is much discontent among men. Many objections may arise in the mind to this doctrine, and but few feel themselves duly impressed with its reality. In order to obviate such objections, I would observe,

1. The desires which God satisfies are to be *restricted to those of his own creating.* Men have a number of artificial, self-created, and sinful desires..... These he does not engage to satisfy; but merely those which are purely natural.

2. Though God satisfies the desire of every living thing, yet not all *in the same way*, but of every creature according to its nature and circumstances. Many of the creatures, like the lily, neither toil nor spin, but receive the bounties of providence ready prepared to their hand: but this is not the case with all. It is not thus with man: for though we are forbidden to be inordinately careful, yet we must commonly labour for what we have. It is a part of the load laid upon us, that by the sweat of the brow we shall eat bread. Nor do I know whether there be more of judgment than of mercy in this sentence. Idleness is certainly a soil on which sin grows to its greatest perfection. Considering what man is, it is mercy that we have employment. It is among the rich, who have nothing to do, and the very poor, who will do but little, that wickedness is most prevalent.

3. The text expresses what God does *ordinarily*, not *universally*, or in all cases. There are cases of famine; seasons in which God as it were shuts his hand, on account of the sins of men; and if he shuts his hand the heavens become brass, and the earth iron, and millions perish for want of bread. There are also cases more common than famine: great numbers of mankind labour under the hardships of poverty, pine away, and are stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field. But this is one of those evils under which the world groans, owing to the sin of man. If there were no waste or intemperance among one part of mankind, there would be a sufficiency, and more than a sufficiency, for all.

II. We proceed to notice a few of the EVIDENCES by which this important truth is supported.

There are some subjects which are difficult to prove, not from a scarcity, but from a profusion of evidence. Where this is the case, the difficulty lies in selection: I shall content myself with offering three things to your consideration.

1. The supplies we constantly receive cannot be ascribed *to our own labour as their first cause*. The whole of human labour is but a kind of manufactory of the materials with which God is pleased to furnish us. We make nothing: we only change the forms of different productions, to suit our conveniences. We are as really, though not as sensibly, dependent on God as Israel in the wilderness, who were fed with manna from heaven. To this may be added, when we have laboured to the utmost, it amounts to nothing without a divine blessing upon it. All, therefore, that we possess proceeds from the opening of his hand.

2. A consideration of the *number and magnitude of the wants of creatures* will convince us that nothing short of the all-sufficiency of God can supply them. What a quantity of vegetable and animal food is required by a single town, for only one day; more for a city; more for a nation; more still for a world; and that for a succession of ages. And what are men, when compared with the whole animate creation? All nature teems with life. The earth, the air, the sea,—each swarms with being. Whence can all these be continually supplied, but by him that made

them ? *Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.*

3. If we consider the *various ways and means* by which our supplies reach us, we shall be convinced of the truth in question. God does not satisfy our desires immediately, so much as through the medium of second causes ; and though we may be too insensible of that hand which puts all in motion, yet it is no less engaged than if it were supplied by miracle. A concatenation, or chain of causes, is apparent in the works of God. Our food is prepared by a complicate, but beautiful machinery. The heavens are made to hear the earth, the earth to hear the corn, the wine, and the oil, and the corn, the wine, and the oil to hear the people. What is that tendency of various parts of the creation to satisfy the desires of other parts, but the operation of his hand, who is concerned to uphold and render happy the creatures that he hath made ? The earth abounds in fertility, and the air with salubrity: the clouds pour forth their waters on the earth, and the sun its genial rays. Fire and hail, snow and winds and seas contribute to our welfare. We inhale life with every breath we breathe. The elements are employed for our sustenance and happiness.

Look we to instruments as well as means : tender parents have supplied us during our childhood and youth; ways have been opened for our future subsistence ; endearing connexions have been formed, which have proved a source of much enjoyment ; in seasons of difficulty friends have kindly aided us ; supplies have arisen from quarters that we never expected : what are these but the openings of his hand ?

III. Improve the subject. There is no divine truth but is of some account, and this will be found not a little fruitful.

1. If such be the bounty of divine providence, *under what obligations do we lie;* yet what actual returns have we made for all this goodness ? All the return that God requires is a grateful heart ; *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.* But alas ! are there not many of you who are this day his enemies ? The idea is shocking, that such a God should have an enemy ; yet so it is. The worst thing that was said of one of the worst of men was, *He hath eaten at my table, and hath lifted up his heel against*

me! God has been feeding a generation of vipers; which, under the frost of childhood or adversity, seemed to claim his pity: but which, under the sunshine of maturer years and prosperous circumstances do not fail to hiss and spit their venom in his face! These things must all come into account. All God's goodness and all our abuses of it, will be brought to light at the last day.

2. From this view of the divine beneficence, *what encouragement is there to trust in the Lord*, under all our wants and difficulties. With what *ease* can he supply our wants. In how many ways, unknown to us, and unexpected by us, can he give a favourable turn to our affairs. *Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.*

3. If such be the bounty of providence, *what is that of grace?* If this be the opening of his hand, that is the opening of his heart. If he satisfies natural desires, much more those that are spiritual. See ver. 19. That which is only done generally in the one case, is done universally in the other. Not one soul shall perish through famine, or any kind of want, whose desires terminate on Christ.

While, therefore, we cherish gratitude for temporal mercies, let us not rest satisfied in them. God gave Nebuchadnezzar all the kingdoms of the earth. See how light he makes of worldly good, to bestow it on the basest of men; to throw it away as it were, on his worst enemies. Do not be content with Nebuchadnezzar's portion; but rather covet, with Jabez, to be blessed *indeed*. Worldly good, though a blessing in itself, is capable of being turned by sin into a curse. Covet the crowning point of Joseph's portion; not only the precious things of the earth, and the fulness thereof, but *the good will of him that dwelt in the bush!*

4. If God be thus good, *what must sin be*, that can induce him to load this world with such a degree of misery!

5. If God can with such *ease* supply all creation, *what a blessing must redemption be!* For the one he has only to open his hand, and the work is done: the other must be accomplished by the purchase of his blood! God was sufficient for the latter, as well as for the former, as to power: but there are things relative to his

moral conduct which he cannot do: He cannot deny himself. Here lies the great difficulty of salvation.

6. What a motive is here to *be kind to the poor and needy.* If we be children of God we must imitate him: *Thou shalt open thy hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land.*

This may serve as an example of the topical method of preaching; and where it can be accomplished, it is very interesting. But there are some texts which cannot be easily reduced to a single topic: and indeed it is better not to be confined to one method, but to indulge variety. Whatever method may be pursued consistent with *a unity of design* is very allowable. This object may be attained in what is called a *textual* method of division, on which I shall next proceed to offer a few observations.

[N. B. It is not certain that Mr. Fuller ever fulfilled his intention of proceeding with the subject: the foregoing letters are all that can be found.]

THE

GREAT QUESTION ANSWERED.

PART THE FIRST.

And he brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Acts xvi. 30, 31.

That great numbers of people, even in this christianized country are ignorant in the way of salvation, is too evident to be denied. It is manifestly no part of their concern, any more than if they were in no danger of being lost, or there had never been such a thing as salvation heard of. Nor is this true only of weak and illiterate people; men, who in all other concerns are wise, in these things have no knowledge or sense to direct them. The evil, therefore, cannot be ascribed to *simple* ignorance, which, as far as it goes, tends to excuse; but to being *willingly* ignorant; saying unto God, *Depart from us—we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

God, however, has a witness in every man's conscience. Every man, whatever he may pretend, feels himself to be a sinner, and to need forgiveness. Ignorant and idolatrous as the Phillippian jailor had been all his life, yet when death looked him in the face, he trembled and cried for mercy. And if it were thus with the heathen, much more with those who have been educated under the light of revelation. The most careless and thoughtless cannot

stand the approach of death. The courage of the most hardened infidel commonly fails him at that solemn period.

Reader! Are you one of the many who scarcely ever think of these things; and whose chief concern is, what you shall eat, what you shall drink, and wherewithal you shall be clothed? Let the anxiety of a heathen reprove you.

If, like other animals, you were made only to eat and drink, and figure away for a few years, and then to sink into nothing, you might well throw aside every care, except that which respects your present gratification. But you are of an order of beings distinguished from all others in the creation. In your nature is united mortality and immortality: the dust of the ground, and the breath of the Almighty. Life to you is but the introduction to existence, a short voyage which will land you on the shores of eternity. You are surrounded by a number of objects, and feel an interest in each. You build houses, plant orchards, rear animals, and form to yourselves *a home;* but you are not at home. Your feelings associate with these things; but they are not fit associates for you. You may have a portion in all that is doing in your family, and in your country; yea, in some sort, in all that is done under the sun; but this is not sufficient for you. The time draweth nigh when there will be an end to all these things, and they will be as though they had not been; but you will still live. You will witness the wreck of nature itself, and survive it; and stand before the Son of Man at his appearing and kingdom. Can you think of these things, and be unconcerned?

Or, though you be an immortal an accountable creature, (as your conscience tells you you are, whenever you consult it, and sometimes when you would gladly shut your ears against it,) yet *if you had not sinned against your maker*, there would be no cause for alarm. A sinless creature has nothing to fear from a righteous God. The approach of an assize, with all its solemn pomp, does not terrify the innocent: neither would judgment or eternity inspire the least degree of dread, if you were guiltless. But you are a *sinner*, a corrupt branch of a corrupt stock. God placed, as I may say, a generous confidence in our species, and required nothing in return but love; but we have returned him evil for

good. You, for yourself, are conscious that you have done so, and that it is in your very nature to do evil.

Or, though you be what is called a sinner, yet, *if sin were your misfortune, rather than your fault*, you might fly for refuge to the equity of your Maker. But this is not the case. Whatever may be said as to the manner in which you became a sinner, and however you may wish to excuse yourself on that ground, your own conscience bears witness that what you are you choose to be, and occasionally reproaches you for being so. You may speculate upon sin as a kind of hereditary disease, which is merely a misfortune, not a fault: but if so, why do you feel guilt on account of it, any more than of the other? Why do you not also acquit other of blame, where the evil is directed against you? You do not think of excusing a fellow-creature when he injures you, upon any such grounds as you allege in excuse of transgression against God. If the party be *rational and voluntary*, you make no further inquiry; but, without any hesitation, pronounce him criminal. Out of your own mouth therefore shall you be judged. The inability that you feel to do good, is entirely owing to your having *no heart* to it. It is of the same nature as that of an unprincipled servant, who cannot seek his master's interest; but is impelled by his selfishness to be always defrauding him. You would not hold such a servant blameless, nor will God hold you so. You are not destitute of those powers which render us accountable beings, but merely of a heart to make use of them for God. You take pleasure in knowledge, but desire not the knowledge of *his* ways; in conversation, but the mention of serious religion strikes you dumb; in activity, but in his service you are as one that is dead. You are fond of news; but that which angels announced, and the Son of God came down to publish, gives you no pleasure. All these things prove beyond a doubt where the inability lies.

Or, if sin should be allowed to be your fault; yet if it were a *small offence*, an imperfection that might be overlooked, or so slight a matter that you could atone for it by repentance, prayers, or tears, or any effort of your own, there might be less reason for alarm; but neither is this the case. If sin were so light a matter as it is commonly made, how is it that a train of the most awful curs-

es should be denounced against the sinner? Is it possible that a just and good God would curse his creatures in basket and in store, in their houses and in their fields, in their lying down and rising up, and in all that they set their hands to, for a mere trifle, or an imperfection that might be overlooked? If sin were a light thing, how is it that the Father of mercies should have doomed all mankind to death, and to all the miseries that prepare its way, on account of it? How is it that wicked men die under such fearful apprehensions? Above all, how is it that it should require the eternal Son of God to become incarnate, and to be made a sacrifice, to atone for it? But if sin be thus offensive to God, then are you in a fearful situation. If you had the whole world to offer for your ransom, and could shed rivers of tears, and give even the fruit of your body for the sin of your soul, it would be of no account. Were that which you offered ever so pure, it could have no influence whatever towards atoning for your past guilt, any more than the tears of a murderer can atone for blood: but this is not the case; those very performances by which you hope to appease the divine anger, are more offensive to him than the entreaties of a detected adulteress would be to her husband, while her heart, as he well knows, is not with him, but with her paramours. You are, whether you know it or not, *a lost sinner*, and that in the strongest sense of the term. Men judge of sin only by its open acts, but God looketh directly at the heart. Their censures fall only on particular branches of immorality, which strike immediately at the well being of society: but God views the root of the mischief, and takes into consideration all its mischievous bearings. *Know thou, therefore, and consider, that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast done; that thou hast departed from the living God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts.*

Finally: Though your sin be exceedingly offensive to your Creator, and though you can make no atonement for it; yet, if you could *resist his power, escape his hand, or endure his wrath*, your unconcernedness might admit of some kind of apology. Surely I need not prove to you that you cannot resist his power; what is your strength when tried? You may, in the hour of health

and festivity, and when in company with others like yourself, look big, and put out great words, but they are words only. If God do but touch you with his afflicting hand, your strength and your courage instantly forsake you : and will you go on to provoke Omnipotence ? *If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horses? If in the land of peace thou hast been overcome, how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?*—Neither canst thou *escape* his hand ; for whither wilt thou flee? If, attentive to thy safety, the rocks could fall on thee, or the mountains cover thee, yet should they not be able to hide thee from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. God hath beset thee behind and before, and laid his hand upon thee. Whither wilt thou go from his spirit ? Whither wilt thou flee from his presence ? If thou ascend to heaven, he is there ! Or, if thou make thy bed in hell, behold he is there! The only question that remains is, whether you can *endure his displeasure?* And this must surely be a forlorn hope ! By the horrid imprecations which we so commonly hear from hardened sinners, who call upon God to damn their bodies and souls, it would seem as if they laid their account with damnation, and wished to familiarize it ; as if they had made a covenant with death, and with hell were at agreement : but when God shall lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, these refuges of lies will suddenly be swept away.

Reader ! Can thine heart endure, and thine hands be strong, in the day that he shall deal with thee ? Think of the *wrath to come.* If it were founded in caprice or injustice, supported by conscious innocence you might possibly bear it ; but, should you perish, you will be destitute of this. Conscience will eternally say *Amen* to the justice of your sufferings. If you had mere justice done you, unmixed with mercy, your sufferings would be more tolerable than they will be. If you perish, you must have your portion with Bethsaida and Chorazin. Goodness gives an edge to justice. The displeasure of a kind and merciful being, (and such is the wrath of the Lamb,) is insupportable.

If, after having heard these things, and lived in a country where they are fully declared, you do not feel interested by them, you

have reason to fear that God has given you up to hardness of heart, and that that language is fulfilled in you : *Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand ; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive : for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing ; and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.* Remember that in Old Testament times, when God blessed his people Israel with singular temporal blessings, he punished their transgressions mostly by temporal judgments ; but now that we are favoured with singular spiritual privileges, the neglect of them is commonly punished with spiritual judgments.

But, whether you will hear or whether you will forbear, I will declare unto you the only way of salvation. That which was addressed to the Philippian jailor, is addressed to you. *God hath so loved the world, as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.* He has given him, not only to teach us the good and the right way, but to be made a sacrifice for sin, and as such to be himself the way. He suffered from the hands of wicked men ; but this was not all : it pleased the Lord to bruise him. He hath put him to grief, and made his soul an offering for sin. He commanded his sword to awake against him, that through his death he might turn his hand in mercy towards perishing sinners. He hath set him forth to be a propitiation to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. This is the only sacrifice which is well pleasing to God. All that went before were of no account, but as they pointed to it ; and all the prayers and praises of sinful creatures are no otherwise acceptable, than as presented through it. It is not for you to go about to appease the divine displeasure, or to recommend yourself to the Saviour by any efforts of your own ; but, despairing of help from every other quarter, to "receive the atonement which Christ hath made." To this you are *invited*, and that in the most pressing terms. He that made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, hath on this ground committed to his servants the ministry of reconciliation ; and they as

ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by them, pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

The blessings of pardon, peace, and eternal life, are compared to a feast, or marriage-supper, which the King of heaven and earth hath made for his Son; and he hath commanded his servants to go forth, as to the high-ways and hedges, and to invite without distinction; yea, and to compel them to come in. Nor is this all: you are exhorted and commanded to believe in Christ, on pain of damnation. All your other sins expose you merely to the curse of the law; but the sin of unbelief, if persisted in, will expose you, like the barren fig-tree, to the curse of the Saviour, from which there is no redemption.

Say not in thine heart, All these things I have believed from my youth up. You may indeed have been taught them, and have received them as a tradition from your fathers; but such faith is dead, and consequently unoperative. It is the same as that of the Jews towards Moses, which our Saviour would not admit to be faith. *If ye believed Moses*, saith he, *ye would believe me, for he wrote of me.* It is no better than the faith of devils, and in some respects has less influence; for they believe and tremble, whereas you believe and are at ease.

But it may be you will say, 'I have examined Christianity for myself, and am fully persuaded it is true.' Yet it has no effect upon you, any more than if you disbelieved it, unless it be to restrain you within the limits of exterior decorum. Your faith, therefore, must still be *dead, being alone.* Believing in Christ is not the exercise of a mind at ease, casting up the evidences for and against, and then coldly assenting, as in a question of science, to that side which seems to have the greatest weight of proof. To one whose mind is subdued to the obedience of faith, there is indeed no want of evidence; but it is not so much from external proofs, as from its own intrinsic glory, and suitableness to his case as a perishing sinner, that he feels himself impelled to receive it. The gospel is too interesting, and hath too much influence on our past and future conduct, to be an object of unfeeling speculation. It is *a hope set before us*, which none but those who are *ready to perish* will ever embrace. To believe it, is to renounce our own

wisdom, our own righteousness, and our own will, each of which is directly opposed to it ; and to fall into the arms of mere grace, through the atoning blood of the cross. If the good news of salvation be not in this manner believed, it signifies but little what speculative notions we may entertain concerning it ; for where there is no renunciation of self, there is no dependence upon Christ for justification ; and where there is no such dependence, there is no revealed interest in that important blessing; but the curses and threatenings of God stand in all their force against us.

If, after all your examinations, you continue to make light of the gospel-feast, and prefer your farms, merchandizes, or any thing else before it, you will be found to have no part in it. Yet, be it known unto you, that the feast shall not be unattended. Heaven shall not go without inhabitants, nor Christ without reward, whether you be saved or lost. The stone set at nought by man, is nevertheless the head of the corner. Consider then, take advice, and speak your mind.

PART THE SECOND.

Had this question been addressed to the first genius upon earth, unacquainted with the gospel, it could not have been answered. Had it been put to all the great philosophers of antiquity, one by one, and to all the learned doctors among the Jews, none of them could have resolved it to any good purpose. Nor, amidst all the boasted light of modern times, can a single unbeliever be found who would know what to do with it. Yet it is a question which arises in almost every man's mind, at one period or other of his life; and a question that must be resolved, or we are lost for ever.

Reader! It is possible this important question has already occupied your mind. An alarming sermon, a death in your family, a hint from a faithful friend, or, it may be, an impressive dream has awakened your attention. You cannot take pleasure as formerly, in worldly, company and pursuits: yet you have no pleasure in religion. You have left off many vices, and have complied with many religious duties; but can find no rest for your soul. The remembrance of the past is bitter: the prospect of the future may be more so. The thoughts of God trouble you. You have even wished that you had never been born, or that you could now shrink back into non-existence, or that you were any thing rather than a man. But you are aware that all these wishes are vain. You do exist; your nature is stamped with immortality; you must go forward and die, and stand before this holy Lord God!

If these, or such like exercises, occupy your mind, the question of the Phillippian Jailor is yours; and to you let me address a few directions included or implied in the answer.

If, by this question, you mean, What can you do to appease the wrath of God, or recommend yourself as a fit object of his mercy? What can you do as a good deed, or the beginning of a course of

good deeds, in reward of which he may bestow upon you an interest in the Saviour? I answer, *Nothing*. An interest in Christ, and eternal life, is indeed given as a reward; but not of any thing we have done, or can do; no, not by divine assistance: it is the reward of the obedience of Christ unto death. To us it is of mere grace, and as such must be received, Faith, though in itself a holy exercise of the mind, yet, as that by which we are justified, is directly opposed to doing. *To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt: but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.* He that worketh, seeks to obtain life, and the favour of God, in some way or other, as a reward; but he that believeth, receives it as a free gift to the unworthy. And let me apprise you, that this is the state of mind you must be brought to, or you must perish for ever. So far as you think of doing any thing, call it what you may, with a hope of being pardoned and justified for its sake, so far you reject the only way of salvation, and have reason to expect your portion with unbelievers.

Let me deal freely with you. Yours is a most serious situation, The gospel-rest is before you; and if you enter not in, it will be because of unbelief. You know the answer given to the jailor; and this is the only answer that can with safety be given to you. Consider and beware, as you regard your eternal salvation, that you take up your rest in nothing short of it.

But in the first place, let me declare unto you the gospel of God, which you are directed to believe. If this meet your case; if, rightly understood, it approve itself not only to your conscience, but your whole soul; if it accord with your desires, as it undoubtedly does with your necessities; all is well, and well for ever. I shall not trouble you with the opinions of men as to what the gospel is, nor even with my own, but direct you to the accounts given of it by him whose it is. The New Testament abounds with epitomes, or brief descriptions of it, delivered in such plain and pointed language, that he that runs may read it. Such are the following: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you* THE GOSPEL

which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures,—This is a faithful saying, (a truth of such importance as to have become a kind of Christian proverb,) *and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.—We* PREACH *Christ crucified.—I determined* NOT TO KNOW ANY THING *among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.*—THIS IS THE RECORD, *that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

It is not meant, by these brief descriptions of the gospel, that there is no other truth necessary to be believed; but that the doctrine of the cross, properly embraced, includes all others, or draws after it the belief of them.

The import of this gospel is, that God is in the right, and we are in the wrong; that we have transgressed against him without cause, and are justly exposed to everlasting punishment; that mercy, originating purely in himself, required, for the due honour of his government, to be exercised through the atonement of his beloved Son; that with this sacrifice God is well pleased, and can, consistently with all his perfections, pardon and accept of any sinner, whatever he hath done, who believeth in him.

What say you to this? The truth of it has been confirmed by the most unquestionable proofs. It first began to be spoken by the Lord himself, and has been confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles. The witness of the three in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, is borne to this; namely, that *God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son;* and to this also is directed the witness of the three on earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood. Can you subscribe to this great truth in all its bearings, and rest the salvation of your soul upon it? or do you doubt whether you be so guilty, so helpless, and in so dangerous a state, as this doctrine supposes? Is it as

one of the chief of sinners that you view yourself? or does it grate with your feelings to receive forgiveness in that humble character? In suing for mercy, are you content to stand on the same low ground as if you were a convict actually going to be executed? or does your heart secretly pine after a salvation less humiliating, in which some account might be made of that difference of character by which you may have been distinguished from the vilest of men, and in which you might be somewhat a co-operator with God? Does that which pleases God, please you? or does your mind revolt at it? It meets all your wants; but not one of your prejudices, proud thoughts, or vicious propensities: all these must come down, and be made a sacrifice to it. Can you subscribe it on these terms?

I am well aware, that the great concern of persons in your situation is, to obtain *peace of mind;* and any thing which promises to afford this, attracts your attention. If this gospel be believed with all your heart, it will give you peace. This is the good, and the old way; walk in it, and you will find rest for your soul: but it is not every thing which promises peace that will ultimately afford it. It is at our peril to offer you other consolation; and at yours to receive it.

Consider, and beware, I say again, as you regard your eternal salvation, that you take up your rest in nothing short of Christ!—With a few serious cautions against some of your principal dangers, I shall conclude this address.

First: *Beware of brooding over your guilt in a way of unbelieving despondency, and so standing aloof from the hope of mercy.* Say not, my sins have been too great, too numerous, or too aggravated to be forgiven. *The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth from* ALL SIN: believest thou this? You are not straitened in him; but in your own bowels. God's thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor his ways as your ways: as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than your thoughts, and his ways than your ways. On the sinner that returneth to our God he bestoweth abundant pardon. It is not, if thou canst do any thing, help me; but, *If thou canst believe—all things are possible to him that believeth.* Of what dost thou doubt—of his all-sufficiency?

He is able to save to the UTTERMOST *all that come unto God by him.* Of his willingness? Ought not his gracious invitations to satisfy thee on this head? Can you imagine that he would proclaim, saying, *Whosoever thirsteth, let him come unto me and drink*, and yet be reluctant to gratify the desires of those that come to him? Objections on the ground of the greatness of guilt and unworthiness, may seem to wear the face of modesty and humility; but after all it becomes you to consider whether they be any other than the workings of a self-righteous spirit. If you could find in your heart to accept of mercy as one of the chief of sinners, all your objections would vanish in a moment. One sees in your very tears of despondency, a pining after acceptance with God by something in yourself. Were they put into words, they would amount to something like this :—'If I had but somewhat to recommend me to the Saviour, I could go to him with assurance; or If I had been less wicked, I might hope for acceptance.' And what is this but making good the complaint of our Saviour? *Ye will not come to me that ye may have life!* Such longing after something to recommend you to the Saviour, is no other than *going about to establish your own righteousness;* and while this is the case, there is great danger of your being given up to imagine that you find the worthiness in yourself which your soul desireth.

Secondly: *Beware of dwelling, in a way of self-complacency, on those reformations which may have been produced by the power of conviction.* This is another of those workings of unbelief, by which many have come short of believing, and so of entering into rest. There is no doubt but your convictions have driven you from the commission of grosser vices, and probably have frightened you into a compliance with various religious duties: but these are only the loppings off of the branches of sin: the root remains unmortified. It is not the breaking off of your sins that will turn to any account, unless they be broken off *by righteousness*; and this will not be the case but by believing in Christ. The power of corruption may have only retired into its strong holds, from whence, if you embrace not the gospel way of salvation, it will soon come forth with increased energy, and sweep away all your cobweb reformations. Nay, it is very possible, that while the

lusts of the flesh have seemed to recede, those of the *mind*, particularly spiritual pride, may have already increased in strength. If, indeed, you dwell on your reformations, and draw comfort from them, it is an undoubted proof that it is so; and then, instead of being reformed, or nearer the kingdom of heaven than you were before, your character is more offensive to God than ever. Publicans and harlots are more likely to enter into it than you.—Besides, if your reformations were ever so virtuous, (which they are not, in his sight by whom actions are weighed,) yet, while you are an unbeliever, they cannot be accepted. You yourself must first be accepted in the Beloved, ere any thing that you offer can be received. "It does not consist with the honour of the majesty of the King of heaven and earth, to accept of any thing from a condemned malefactor, condemned by the justice of his own holy law, till that condemnation be removed."

Thirdly: *Beware of deriving comfort from the distress of mind which you may have undergone, or from any feelings within you.* Some religious people will tell you, that these workings of mind are a sign that God has mercy in reserve for you; and that if you go on in the way you are in, waiting as at the pool, all will be well in the end: but do not you believe them. They have no scripture warrant for what they say. It is not your being distressed in mind that will prove any thing in your favour, but the issue of it. Saul was distressed, as well as David; and Judas, as well as Peter. When the murderers of our Lord were pricked in their hearts, Peter did not comfort them by representing this their unhappiness as a hopeful sign of conversion; but exhorted them to *repent and be baptized, every one of them, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.* And thus it was with Paul and Silas, when the jailor was impressed with fear and dismay: they gave him no encouragement from thence, but preached Jesus Christ as the only source of hope. If one who had slain a man in Israel had stopped short of the city of refuge, and endeavoured to draw comfort from the alarm which he had felt, lest the avenger of blood should overtake him, would he have been safe? There is no security to you, or to any man, but in fleeing immediately to the gospel-refuge, and laying hold of the hope set before you. If you take comfort from

your distress, you are in imminent danger of stopping short of Christ, and so of perishing for ever. Many, no doubt, have done so ; and that which they have accounted waiting at the pool for the moving of the waters, has proved no other than settling upon a false foundation. Indeed it must needs be so : for as there is no medium in one that has heard the gospel, between faith and unbelief, he that does not believe in Jesus for salvation, if he have any hope of it, must derive that hope from something in himself.

Fourthly : *Beware of making faith itself, as an act of yours, the ground of acceptance with God.* It is true that believing is an act of yours, and an act of obedience to God. Far be it from me that I should convey an idea of any thing short of a cordial reception of the gospel being accompanied with salvation ; a reception that involves a renunciation of self-righteousness, and a submission to the righteousness of God. But if you consider it as a species of sincere obedience, which God has consented to accept instead of a perfect one ; and if you hope to be justified in reward of it, you are still *going about to establish your own righteousness* under an evangelical name. This is the commandment of God, that ye believe on the name of his Son. Faith is an act of obedience to God yet it is not as such that it justifies us ; but as receiving Christ, and bringing us into a living union with him, *for whose sake alone* we are accepted and saved. If you truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, you will think nothing of the workings of your own mind, but of his work who came into the world to save the chief of sinners.

Finally : *Beware of taking comfort from any impulse, or unfounded persuasion that your sins are forgiven, and that you are a favourite of God.* Many are deceived in this way, and mistake such a persuasion for faith itself. When a sinner is driven from all his former holds, it is not unusual for him, instead of falling at the feet of Christ as utterly lost, to catch at any new conceit, however unscriptural and absurd, if it will but afford him relief. If, in such a state of mind, he receive an impression, perhaps in the words of scripture, that God has forgiven and accepted him, or dream that he is in heaven, or read a book, or hear a sermon which is favourable to such a method of obtaining relief, he eagerly im-

bibes it, and becomes intoxicated with the delicious draught. The joy of hope being so new and unexpected a thing, and succeeding to great darkness and distress, produces a wonderful change in his mind. Now he thinks he has discovered the light of life, and feels to have lost his burden. Now he has found out the true religion, and all that he read or heard before, not affording him relief, is false doctrine, or legal preaching. Being treated also as one of the dear children of God, by others of the same description, he is attached to his flatterers, and despises those as graceless, who would rob him of his comforts, by warning him against *the lie which is in his right hand.*

I do not mean to say that all consolation which comes suddenly to the mind, or by the impression of a passage of scripture, any more than by reading or hearing, is delusive. It is not the *manner* in which we obtain relief that is of any account, but *what it is that comforts us.* If it be the doctrine of the cross, or any revealed truth pertaining to it, this is gospel consolation ; but if it be a supposed revelation from heaven, of something which is not taught in the scriptures, that is a species of comfort on which no dependance can be placed. A believer may be so far misled, as to be carried away with it ; but if a man have nothing better, he is still an unbeliever.

To conclude : If ever you obtain that rest for your soul which will bear the light, it must be, not from any thing within you, but by looking out of yourself to Christ, as revealed in the gospel. You may afterwards know that you have passed from death unto life, by the love you bear to the brethren, and by many other scriptural evidences ; and from the time of your embracing the gospel remedy, you may be conscious of it, and so enjoy the hope of the promised salvation ; but your first relief, if it be genuine, will be drawn directly from Christ, or from finding that in the doctrine of salvation through his death, which suits your wants and wishes as a perishing sinner.

THE BACKSLIDER:

OR

AN ENQUIRY

INTO

THE NATURE, SYMPTOMS, AND EFFECTS, OF RELIGOUS DECLENSION,

WITH

THE MEANS OF RECOVERY.*

I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: and lo! it was all grown over with thorns; nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction.

WHETHER the present age be worse than others which have preceded it, I shall not determine; but this is manifest, that it abounds not only in infidelity and profligacy, but with great numbers of loose characters among professing Christians. It is true, there are some eminently zealous and spiritual, perhaps as much so as at almost any former period: the disinterested concern which has appeared for the diffusion of evangelical religion is doubtless a hopeful feature of our times; yet it is no less evident that others

* The following pages were occasioned by the Writer's observing several persons, of whom he had formerly entertained a favourable opinion, and with whom he had walked in Christian fellowship, having fallen either from the doctrine, or practice of pure religion. A view of their unhappy condition made a deep impression upon his mind. If he has been enabled to describe the case of a backslider to any good purpose, it has been chiefly owing to this circumstance. He hopes that, though it was written with a special eye to a few, it may yet be useful to many.

are in a sad degree conformed to this world, instead of being transformed by the renewing of their minds. Even of those who retain a decency of character, many are sunk into a Laodicean lukewarmness. Professors are continually falling away from Christ; either totally so as to walk no more with him; or partially, so as greatly to dishonour his name. Alas, how many characters of this description are to be found in our congregations! If we only review the progress of things for twenty or thirty years past, we shall perceive many who once bid fair for the kingdom of heaven now fallen a prey to the temptations of the world. Like the blossoms in the spring, they for a time excited our hopes; but a blight has succeeded: the blossom *has gone up as the dust*, and *the root* in many cases appear to be *rottenness*.

It is one important branch of the work of a faithful pastor to strengthen the deceased, to heal the sick, to bind up the broken, to bring again that which is driven away, and to seek that which is lost.* If these pages might fall into the hands of a few of the above description, and contribute in any degree to their recovery from the snare of the devil, the writer will be amply rewarded. It is a pleasure to recover any sinner from the error of his ways; but much more those of whom we once thought favourably. The place which they formerly occupied in our esteem, our hopes, and our social exercises, now seems to be a kind of chasm, which can only be filled up by the return of the party. If a child depart from his father's house, and plunge into profligacy and ruin, the father may have other children, and may love them: but none of them can heal his wound, nor any thing satisfy him, but the return of *him that was lost*.

In pursuit of this desirable object, I shall describe the nature and different species of backsliding from God; notice the symptoms of it; trace its injurious and dangerous effects; and point out the means of recovery.

*Ezek. xxxiv. 4.

ON THE

GENERAL NATURE AND DIFFERENT SPECIES

OF

BACKSLIDING.

All backsliding from God originates in a departure of heart from him: herein consists the essence and the evil of it. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know, therefore, and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that* THOU HAST FORSAKEN THE LORD THY GOD, *and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts.* But the degrees of this sin, and the modes in which it operates, are various.

The backsliding of some is *total.* After having made a profession of the true religion, they apostatize from it. I am aware it is common to consider a backslider as being a good man, though in a bad state of mind: but the scriptures do not confine the term to this application. Those who are addressed in the passage just quoted, had not *the fear of God in them*, which can never be said of a good man. Backsliding, it is true, always supposes a *profession* of the true religion; but it does not necessarily suppose the existence of the thing professed. There is a PERPETUAL *backsliding*, and a *drawing back* UNTO PERDITION.* Such characters were Saul, and Ahithophel, and Judas. Many persons who have in a great degree declined the practice of religion, yet comfort themselves with an idea that they shall be brought to repentance before they die; but this is presumtuously tempting God. Whoso-

* Jer. viii. 5. Heb. x. 39.

ever plunges into this gulf, or continues easy in it under an idea of being recovered by repentance, may find himself mistaken. Both Peter and Judas went in; but only one of them came out! There is reason to fear that thousands of professors are now lifting up their eyes in torment, who in this world reckoned themselves good men, who considered their sins as pardonable errors, and laid their accounts with being brought to repentance: but, ere they were aware, the bridegroom came, and they were not ready to meet him!

The nature and deadly tendency of sin is the same in itself, whether in a wicked or in a righteous man: there is an important difference, however, between the backsliding of the one, and that of the other. That of the hypocrite arises from his having *no root* in himself; therefore it is that in the time of temptation he falleth away; but that of the sincere Christian respects the culture of the branch, and is owing to unwatchfulness, or remissness in duty. The first, in turning back, returns to a course which his heart always preferred: the last, though in what he does he is not absolutely involuntary, for then it were innocent; yet it is not with a full or perfect consent of his will. He does not sin *wilfully:* that which he does *he allows not:* it is against the habitual *disposition* of his soul: he is not himself as we should say while so acting.* Finally, The one, were it not for the remorse of conscience which may continue to haunt him, and disturb his peace, would be in his element in having made a full riddance of religion; but this is not the case with the other. A life of deviation and distance from God is not his element, nor can he enjoy himself in it. This difference is remarkably exemplified in the cases of Saul and David. The religion of the former never appears to have fitted him: he

* It is usual to denominate a character by his habitual, or ruling disposition, and not by occasional deviations from it. Thus when we hear of him who was famed for *meekness*, speaking *unadvisedly* with his lips, we say, This was not Moses; or of him who was distinguished by his courageous avowal of his Lord, denying with oaths that he knew him, we say, This was not Peter. Both these great characters, in these instances, acted *beside themselves*: It was not *them*, as it were, but sin that dwelt in them. See Heb. x. 26. Rom. vii. 15—26.

was continually acting awkwardly with it and presently threw it aside. If, in addition to this, he could have forgotten it, and lived without being terrified by the apprehension of consequences, he would doubtless have been much the happier for having cast it off. But when the latter had sinned, he was not like the raven which went forth of the ark, and came no more; but like the dove which could find no rest for the sole of her foot till she returned. The thirty-second and thirty-eighth Psalms express the wretchedness of his mind till he confessed his sin, and obtained mercy.

But, whatever difference there be between a partial and a total departure from God, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for the party himself, at the time to perceive it. So long as any man continues in a backsliding state, the reality of his religion must remain uncertain. He may not be without hope, nor ought he to be without fear. The scriptures know nothing of that kind of confidence which renders men easy in their sins. Paul stood in *doubt* of the Galatians, and they ought to have stood in doubt of themselves.—The species of backsliding are various: some respect doctrine, others practice; but all are the operations of a heart departing from the living God.

In some, a backsliding spirit first appears *by a relinquishment of evangelical doctrine.* Where truth is treated merely as a matter of speculation, or as an opinion of no great moment, it is not *held fast;* and where this is the case, it is easily surrendered. If a plausible book, in favour of deism, or any of those vain systems which nearly approach it, fall in their way, they are ready to yield; and by reading the performance a second time, or conversing with a person who favours it, they make shipwreck of their faith, and are driven on the rocks of infidelity. Such was the process in the days of the apostles: those who receive not the *love of the truth*, were given up to *believe a lie.**

If these departures from evangelical principles were closely examined, it would be found that they were preceded by a neglect of private prayer, watchfulness, self-diffidence, and walking humbly

* 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11.

with God ; and every one may perceive that they are followed with similar effects. It has been acknowledged, by some who have embraced the Socinian system, that since they entertained those views, they had lost even the gift of prayer. Perhaps they might draw up and read *an address to the Deity;* but they could not pray. Where the principles of the gospel are abandoned, the spirit of prayer, and of all close walking with God, will go with it. The confession of Peter, that *Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God*, is thought to be that which our Lord denominates the *rock* on which he would build his church We are sure that the belief of this article of faith was required as a kind of test of Christianity : and who can look into the Christian world with attention, and not perceive that it still continues a sort of key-stone to the building ? If this give way, the fabric falls. Backslidings of this nature are infinitely dangerous. He that declines in holy practice has to labour against the remonstrances of conscience : but he that brings himself to think lightly of sin, and meanly of the Saviour, (which is what every false system of religion teaches,) has gone far towards silencing the accusations of this unpleasant monitor. He is upon good terms with himself. The disorder of his soul is deep : but it is of a flattering nature. The declension of serious religion in him is no less apparent to *others*, than that of the constitution by a consuming hectic : yet, as is common in such cases. the party himself thinks he shall do well. In short, *the light which is in him is darkness* ; and this the greatest of all darkness !

In others, a departure of heart from God is followed by *falling into some gross immorality*.—There are instances in which a sudden misconduct of this sort has been overruled for the awakening of the mind from its stupor, and divesting it of its self-confidence. It was manifestly thus with the apostle Peter. The stumbling of such persons is not that they should fall ; but rather that they should stand with greater care and firmness. But the greatest danger arises from those cases where some lust of the flesh has gradually obtained an ascendency over the heart ; so that when the subject of it falls in the eyes of the world, it is only appearing to be what he has long been in secret ; and the first wrong step that he makes, instead of alarming him, and occasioning his going aside to weep

bitterly, is only the prelude of a succession of others. This is not the fall of one who is *overtaken* in a fault ; but of one who is entangled in the net of his own corruptions. One sin prepares the way for another. Like the insect infolded in the spider's web, he loses all power of resistance, and falls a prey to the destroyer. Some have fallen sacrifices to intemperance, not by being overtaken in a single act of intoxication ; but by contracting a habit of hard drinking. First, it was indulged in private, perhaps under some outward trouble, instead of carrying it to a throne of grace. In a little time its demands increased. At length it could no longer be kept a secret ; reason was enslaved to sense, and the Christian professor sunk below the man ! Others have indulged in impurity. 'Intimacies which may have arisen from nothing worse than a few improper familiarities ; yea, which in some instances have originated in religion itself, have been known, through the corrupt propensities of the human heart, which turns every thing it touches into poison, to produce the most fatal effects. Passions of this sort once kindled will soon possess all the soul. They leave no room for any thing that should resist them ; not only consuming every spiritual desire and holy thought, but banishing from the mind even the sober dictates of reason ; reducing the most exalted characters to the rank of *fools in Israel.* Near these rocks are seen many a floating wreck ; and among these quicksands numbers who once bade fair for the haven of everlasting life.

Another way in which a departure from God very often operates, is, by *the love of the world.*—It is not uncommon for persons who once appeared to be zealous, affectionate, and devoted to God, when they come to be settled in life, and to enter into its necessary avocations, to lose all heart for religion, and take no delight in any thing but saving money. This, it is true. is not generally considered by the world as disreputable : on the contrary, provided we be fair in our dealings, it is reckoned a mark of wisdom. *Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.* Such a one, say they, is a discreet man, and one that knows how to secure the *main chance.* Yet the scriptures are very decisive against such characters. This is the sin which they denominate the *lust of the eye.*

The cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, are described as *choking the word*, and rendering it unfruitful. It is worthy of special notice, that when our Lord had warned his followers *to take heed and beware of covetousness*, the example which he gives of this sin is not of one that was a plunderer of other men's property, an unfair dealer, or an oppressor of the poor; but of a *certain rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully;* and whose only object appeared to be, first to acquire a handsome fortune, and then to retire from business and live at his ease. This also appears to be the character which is *blessed* by wicked men, but *abhorred of God.** A man who deals unfairly with men, gains not their blessing, but their curse. Men in general regard only themselves: so long, therefore, as any person deals justly with them, they care not what his conduct is towards God. But it is affecting to think that the very character which they bless and envy, God abhors. The decision of heaven is nothing less than this, *If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him.* So far is the love of this world from being the less dangerous on account of its falling so little under human censure, that it is the more so. If we be guilty of any thing which exposes us to the reproach of mankind, such reproach may assist the remonstrances of conscience, and of God, in carrying conviction to our bosoms; but of that for which the world acquits us, we shall be exceedingly disposed to acquit ourselves.

It has long appeared to me, that this species of covetousness will, in all probability, prove the eternal overthrow of more characters among professing people than almost any other sin; and this because it is almost the only sin which may be indulged, and a profession of religion at the same time supported. If a man be a drunkard, a fornicator, an adulterer, or a liar; if he rob his neighbour, oppress the poor, or deal unjustly, he must give up his pretensions to religion; or if not, his religious connexions, if they are worthy of being so denominated, will give him up: but he may *love the world, and the things of the world,* and at the same time retain his character. If the depravity of the human heart be not subdued by the grace of God, it will operate. If a dam be placed across some of its ordinary channels, it will flow with greater depth and rapidity in those which remain. It is thus, perhaps,

* Psa. x. 3.

that avarice is most prevalent in old age, when the power of pursuing other vices has, in a great measure subsided. And thus it is with religious professors, whose hearts are not right with God. They cannot figure away with the profane, nor indulge in gross immoralities: but they can love the world supremely, to the neglect of God, and be scarcely amenable to human judgment.

And whatever may prove the overthrow of a mere professor, may be a temptation to a good man, and greatly injure his soul. Of this the case of Lot, when he parted with Abraham, furnishes an affecting example. When a situation was put to his choice, *he lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, thas it was well watered every where;* and he took up his residence in Sodom. He had better have dwelt in a wilderness, than among that debauched people: but he consulted worldly advantages, and the spiritual well-being of his family was over-looked. And what was the consequence? It is true, he was a righteous man, and his righteous soul was grieved with the filthy conversation of the wicked from day to day: but he could have very little influence over them; while they, on the contrary, found means of communicating their odious vices to his family. Some of his daughters appear to have been married while in Sodom; and when the city was to be destroyed, neither they nor their husbands could be persuaded to make their escape, and so probably perished in the overthrow. The heart of the wife was so attached it seems, to what she had left behind, that she must needs *look back;* for which she was rendered a monument of divine displeasure. And as to his two single daughters, though they escaped with him to the mountain, yet they had learnt so much of the ways of Sodom as to cover his old age with infamy. This, together with the loss of all his substance were the fruits of the *well-watered plain*, which he had fixed his eyes upon, to the neglect of his spiritual interest. Yet how frequently is the same part acted over again. In the choice of settlements for ourselves, or our children, how common is it to overlook the immorality of the place, the irreligiousness of the connexions, or the want of a gospel ministry; and to direct our inquiries only to temporal advantages. From the same principle also, many have dealt largely in speculation, and plunged into en

gagements far beyond their circumstances. The hope of making a fortune, as it is termed by some lucky hit, draws them into measures which ruin, not only themselves, but many who confide in them. That mere worldly men should act in this manner, is not a matter of surprise ; but that men professing to fear God should imitate them . . . . . *this is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.* Farther: Many have fallen sacrifices not only to the love of the world, but to a *conformity to it.*—These are not the same thing, though frequently found in the same person. The object of the one is principally the acquisition of wealth; the other respects the manner of spending it. That is often penurious ; this wishes to cut a figure, and to appear like people of fashion. The former is *the lust of the eye ;* the latter is *the pride of life.* We need not affect singularity in things indifferent ; but to engage in the chase of fashionable appearance, is not only an indication of a vain and little mind, but is certainly inconsistant with pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. The desire of making an appearance has ruined many people in their circumstances, more in their characters, and most of all in their souls. We may flatter ourselves that we can pursue these things, and be religious at the same time ; but it is a mistake. The vanity of mind which they cherish eats up every thing of a humble, serious, and holy nature : rendering us an easy prey to temptation, when solicited to do as others do in an evil thing. A Christian's rule is the revealed will of God ; and where the customs of the world run counter to this, it is his business to withstand them; even though in so doing he may have to withstand a multititude, yea, and a multitude of people of fashion : but if we feel ambitious of their applause, we shall not be able to endure the scorn which a singularity of conduct will draw upon us. Thus we shall be carried down the stream by the course of this world ; and shall either fall into the gulf of perdition, or if any good thing should be found in us towards the Lord God of Israel, it will be almost indiscernable and useless. In short, such characters are certainly in a backsliding state, whether they be ever recovered from it or not. The case of the Laodiceans seems to approach the nearest to theirs, of any thing which in scripture occurs to me.

They were *neither cold nor hot;* neither the decided friends of Christ, nor his avowed enemies: they could not relinquish the world in favour of religion, yet neither could they let religion alone. They were vainly puffed up with a notion of their wealth, their wisdom, and their finery; saying, *I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing:* but in the account of the faithful and true witness, they were *poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked.* Such a decision ought to make us tremble at the thought of aspiring to imitate people of fashion.

Finally: There is another species of departure from God which it becomes me to notice, as many in the present age have fallen sacrifices to it. This is *taking an eager and deep interest in political disputes.*—The state of things in the world has of late been such as to attract the attention, and employ the conversation of all classes of people. As success has attended each of the contending parties, the minds of men, according to their views and attachments, have been affected; some with fear and dismay, lest their party interests should be ruined; others with the most sanguine hopes, as if the world were shortly to be emancipated, war abolished, and all degrees of men rendered happy. This is one of those strong winds of temptation that occasionally arise in the troubled ocean of this world, against which those who are bound to a better, had need to be on their guard. The flattering objects held out by revolutionists were so congenial with the wishes of humanity, and their pretences to disinterested philanthropy so fair, that many religious people, for a time, forgot their own principles. While gazing on the splendid spectacle, it did not occur to them, that *the wicked*, whatever name they assumed, *would do wickedly.* By observing the progress of things, however, they have been convinced that all hopes of the state of mankind being essentially meliorated by any means short of the prevalence of the gospel are visionary, and have accordingly turned their attention to better things. But some have gone greater lengths. Their whole heart has been engaged in this pursuit. It has been their meat and their drink: and this being the case, it is not surprising that they have become indifferent to religion; for these things cannot consist with each other. It is not only contrary to the

whole tenor of the New Testament, but tends in its own nature to eat up true religion. If any worldly matter, however lawful in itself, engage our attention inordinately, it becomes a snare; and more so in matters that do not come within the line of our immediate duty. But if in attending to it, we are obliged to neglect what manifestly *is* our duty, and to overleap the boundaries of God's holy word, let us look to it: beyond those boundaries is a pit, in which there is reason to fear great numbers have been lost. There were many, in the early ages of Christianity, who *despised government*, and were not afraid to speak evil of dignities: but were they good men? Far from it. They were professors of Christianity, however; for they are said to have *escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of Christ:* yea, and what is more, they had attained the character of Christian *teachers*. But of what description? *False teachers, who privily brought in damnable heresies, denying the Lord who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction*—whose *ways*, though *followed by many*, were *pernicious*, occasioning *the way of truth to be evil spoken of*. To copy the examples of such men is no light matter.

When a man's thoughts and affections are filled with such things as these, the scriptures become a kind of *dead letter*, while the speeches and writings of politicians are the *lively oracles:* spiritual conversation is unheard, or, if introduced by others, considered as a flat and uninteresting topic; and leisure hours, whether sitting in the house or walking by the way, instead of being employed in talking and meditating on divine subjects, are engrossed by things which do not profit. Such are the rocks among which many have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

Whatever may be the duty of a nation in extraordinary cases, there is scarcely any thing in all the New Testament inculcated with more solemnity than that individuals, and especially Christians, should be obedient, peaceable, and loyal subjects; nor is there any sin much more awfully censured than the contrary conduct. It requires not only that we keep within the compass of the laws, (which is easily done by men of the most unprincipled minds,) but that we honour, and *intercede with God* for those who administer them. These duties were pressed particularly upon

the Romans, who, by their situation, were more exposed than others to the temptation of joining in factions, and conspiracies, which were almost continually at work in that tumultuous city.

Nor does the danger belong exclusively to one side. We may sin by an *adherence* to the measures of a government, as well as by an opposition to them. If we enlist under the banners of the party in power, *considered as a party*, we shall be disposed to vindicate or palliate all their proceedings, which may be very inconsistent with Christianity. Paul, though he enjoined obedience to the existing government, yet was never an advocate for Roman ambition; and when addressing himself to a governor, did not fail to *reason on righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.* It is our duty, no doubt, to consider that many things which seem evil to us might appear otherwise, if all the circumstances of the case were known; and therefore to forbear passing hasty censures: but, on the other hand, we ought to be aware of applauding every thing that is done, lest, if it be evil, we be partakers of other men's sins, and contribute to their being repeated.

While some burning with revolutionary zeal, have imagined they could discover all the wonderful events of the present day in scripture prophecy, and have been nearly blinded to the criminality of the principal agents; others by a contrary prejudice, have disregarded the works of the Lord, and the operations of his hand. Whatever may be said of means and instruments, we must be strangely insensible not to see the hand of God in the late overturnings among the Papal powers; and if we be induced by political attachment, instead of joining the inhabitants of heaven in a song of praise, to unite with the *merchants of the earth* in their lamentations, are we not carnal? There is no need of vindicating or palliating the measures of men which may be wicked in the extreme; but neither ought we to overlook the hand of God.

The great point with Christians should be, an attachment to government *as government*, irrespective of the party which administers it; for this is right, and would tend more than any thing to promote the kingdom of Christ. We are are not called to yield up our consciences in religious matters, nor to approve of what is wrong in those which are civil; but we are not at liberty to deal in

acrimony, or evil speaking. The good which results to society from the very worst government upon earth is great when compared with the evils of anarchy. On this principle, it is probable that the Apostle enjoined obedience to *the powers that were*, even during the reign of Nero. Christians are soldiers under the King of kings: their object should be to conquer all ranks and degrees of men to the obedience of faith. But to do this, it is necessary that they avoid all those entanglements and disputes which retard their main design. If a wise man wishes to gain over a nation to any great and worthy object, he does not enter into their little differences, nor embroil himself in their party contentions; but bearing good will to all, seeks the general good: by these means he is respected by all, and all are ready to hear what he has to offer. Such should be the wisdom of Christians. There is enmity enough for us to encounter, without unnecessarily adding to it.

If a Christian be under the necessity of siding with a party, undoubtedly he ought to act in favour, of that which appears to him the best; but even in this case it is not becoming him to enter with eagerness into their disputes. Let worldly men, who thirst after preferment, busy themselves in a contested election—(they have their reward)—but let Christians, if called to appear, discharge their duty, and retire from the tumultuous scene.

By entering deeply into the *party* contentions of the nation, religious people will be charged, on both sides in their turn, with disloyality; and it may be, not always without a cause. Fifty years ago, that party was out of power which at present is in power. At that time the charge of disloyality was directed against them; and they were then denominated *patriots*. It is possible that many who now seem to abhor a spirit of disaffection towards administrative government, would be themselves not the best affected, were the other side to recover its authority. But if we enter into the spirit of the gospel, though we may have our preferences of men and measures, we shall bear good-will to all; and whoever be at the head of affairs, shall reverence *the powers that be*. Whatever be our private opinion of *the men*, we shall respect and honour *the rulers*. That loyalty which operates only with the

prevalence of a party, which ever it be, is at a great remove from the loyality enjoined by the scriptures.

By standing aloof from all parties *as such*, and approving themselves the friends of government and good order, by whomsoever administered, Christians would acquire a dignity of character worthy of their profession, would be respected by all, and possess greater opportunities of doing good: while by a contrary conduct, they render one part of the community their enemies, and the other, I fear, derive but little spiritual advantage from being their friends.

ON THE SYMPTOMS

OF A

BACKSLIDING SPIRIT.

It was reckoned a matter of consequence in cases of leprosy real or supposed, that the true state of the party should be examined, and judgment given accordingly ; and by how much a moral disease is more odious, contagious, and dangerous, than one that is natural, by so much is it more necessary to form a true judgment concerning it. Every spot was not a leprosy ; and every sinful imperfection in a Christian professor does not denominate him a backslider. Paul had to lament the *body of death ;* he had not attained, nor was he already perfect ; yet he *pressed forward ;* and while this was the case he could not be said to draw back. On the other hand, every departure from God must not not be reckoned a mere imperfection which is common to good men. We are extremely apt, in certain cases, to flatter ourselves that our spots are only the spots of God's children, or such as the best of men are subject to, and therefore to conclude that there is nothing very dangerous about them. We do not pretend to deny that we have our faults : but are ready to ask, *What have we done* so much *against thee?* This self-justifying spirit, however, so far from indicating any thing favourable, is a strong mark of the contrary. It is said of Ephraim, *He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand; he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich: I have found me out substance : in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin:* A more finished picture of a modern oppressor could not be drawn. He studies to keep within the limits of the law, and defies any man to impeach his character ; he has

imperfections, but they are only such as are common to good men: there is nothing criminal to be found in him: yet he is carrying on at the time a system of iniquity.

The apostle Paul speaks of a certain state of mind which he feared he should find in the Corinthians: that of their *hoving sinned, and not repented of their deeds.* This it is which denominates a man a backslider; and which, so long as it continues, deprives him of any scriptural foundation for concluding himself interested in forgiving mercy.—What are the particular symptoms of this state of mind, is the object of our present inquiry.

If our departing from the Lord have issued in some outward misconduct, there is no need of inquiring into the proofs of it, as the thing speaks for itself: but if its operations have been at present only internal, the inquiry may be highly necessary, that we may become acquainted with our condition, and that the disease may be healed ere it finishes its operations. Further: though it may be out of all doubt that we have sinned, yet it may be a matter of uncertainty, whether or not we have repented: if we imagine we have when we have not, the consequence may be of the most serious nature. Let the following observations, then, be attended to.

First: *If religious duties are attended to rather from custom or conscience than from love,* we must either never have known what true religion is, or, in a great degree, have lost the spirit of it.—It is possible that we may have been guilty of no particular outward evil, so as to have fallen under the censure of the world, or of even our nearest connexions, and yet have so far lost the spirit of religion, as to be really in a backsliding state. The exercises of prayer, reading the scriptures, hearing the word, and giving something to the poor, may be kept up in form, and yet be little, if any thing, more than a form. The church of Ephesus was not accused of any particular outward misconduct; but they had *left their first love.* Where this is the case, however, much will be neglected, especially of those parts of duty which fall not under the eye of creatures. It is supposed of the church just referred to, that they had relaxed, if not in the actual performance, yet in the manner of performing their religious exercises; therefore they are exhorted

to *repent, and to do their first works.* A departure from our first love is commonly the first step of a backsliding course. Perhaps if the truth were known, there are few open falls but what are preceded by a secret departure of heart from the living God.

Secondly: *If we have fallen into any particular sin, which exposes us to the censures of our friends, and instead of confessing it with sorrow, are employed in defending or palliating it,* it is a certain proof that we are at present under the power of it.—There are some sins that cannot be defended; but there are others which will admit of much being said on their behalf; and it is admirable with what ingenuity men will go about to find excuses where self is concerned. People that you would hardly think possessed of common sense, will, in this case, be singularly quicksighted, discerning every circumstance that may make in their favour, or serve to extenuate their fault. The cunning of the old serpent which appeared in the excuses of our first parents, seems here to supply the place of wisdom. This self-justifying spirit is a very dangerous symptom: while it continues there is no hope of a good issue. We read of the deceitfulness of sin; and truly it is with great propriety that deceit is ascribed to it. Perhaps there are few persons who are employed in justifying their failings, but who are first imposed upon, or brought to think, some how, that they are, if not quite justifiable, yet very excusable. Sin, when *we* have committed it, loses its sinfulness, and appears a very different thing to what it did in others. David's indignation could rise against the man that had taken an ewe lamb, while to his own conduct, which was much more criminal, he was blinded! When any sin is committed by *us*, it is common for it to assume *another name;* and by means of this we become easily reconciled to it, and are ready to enter on a vindication of it. Covetousness will admit of a defence under the names of prudence, industry, or frugality; conformity to the world may be pleaded for as an exercise of sociability and good breeding; unchristian resentment, as necessary self defence; foolish levity, as innocent mirth; malignant contentions, as zeal for the truth; and indifference to the truth, as candour, or liberality of sentiment.

Thirdly: *Though we do not defend or palliate our sin in words, yet if we continue in the practice of it*, we may be certain we have not repented.—All true repentance is followed by a *forsaking* of the evil, and where this effect is not produced, there can be no scriptural ground to hope for forgiveness. There are sins as before observed, which will admit of no defence. If a person be convicted of them, he can do no other than own himself in the wrong, or at least be silent: yet he may feel no sorrow on their account, nor scarcely any intention to forsake them. When Samuel reproved Saul for his rebellion against the commandment of the Lord, assuring him that God had rejected him from being king, and had given the kingdom to a neighbour of his that was better than he, he was confounded, and compelled to say, *I have sinned:* yet the only concern he discovered was on account of having lost his *honour;* and as soon as he suspected who was his rival, he sought to slay him. Even Solomon discovered a very similar disposition. Instead of lamenting and forsaking the sin for which he had been reproved, as soon as he knew that Jeroboam had been anointed by the prophet Ahijah, he *sought to kill him.* A sullen silence under reproof, and a perseverance in the evil, are certain signs of a hard and impenitent heart.

Fourthly: *Though we should refrain from the practice of the evil yet if it be only a temporary effect of conviction,* there is no true repentance.—It is very common for persons, when they first fall into any gross sin, to feel ashamed and alarmed, to wish they had not acted as they have, and to resolve that they will do so no more: and this, though the love of the evil be the same, and on the first temptation that returns it is committed again, is nevertheless frequently mistaken for repentance. When Saul's life was spared by David, and his groundless malice against him detected, his heart seemed to relent: he felt ashamed, owned his sin, lifted up his voice and wept, and promised to do so no more: but this was not repentance. David appears to have suspected it at the time; for he would not trust himself in his hands; but gat him up into the hold: and the event justified his conduct. The first opportunity that offered, Saul returned to the folly that he had condemned.—A temporary abstinence from evil may also be produced

by some *alarming providence.* When judgments overtake us, and conscience tells us that it is the hand of the Lord stretched out against us for our sin, the mind is appaled with fear, and so ceases to be in a state to pursue its favourite devices. But if, as soon as the pressing hand of providence is removed, the heart returns, like a spring, to its former position, there is no reason to consider its temporary depression as containing any true repentance.

Dr. Owen has expressed these sentiments with that unction of spirit, and deep insight into the human heart, which is peculiar to himself.—

" There are two occasions," says he, " wherein men who are contending with any sin, may seem to themselves to have mortified it.—First, when it hath had some sad eruption to the disturbances of their peace, terror of their consciences, dread of scandal, and evident provocation of God. This awakens and stirs up all that is in the man, and amazes him, fills him with abhorrency of sin, and himself for it ; sends him to God makes him cry out as for life, to abhor his lust as hell, and to set himself against it. The whole man, spiritual and natural, being now awakened, sin shrinks in its head, appears not, but lies as dead before him. As when one that hath drawn nigh to an army in the night, and hath killed a principal person, instantly the guards awake, men are roused up, and strict inquiry is made after the enemy ; who, in the mean time, until the noise and tumult be over, hides himself, or lies like one that is dead, yet with firm resolution to do the like mischief again upon the like opportunity.—— Secondly : In a time of some judgment, calamity, or pressing affliction The heart is then taken up with thoughts and contrivances of flying from the present troubles, fears, and dangers. This, as a convinced person concludes, is to be done only by relinquishment of sin, which gains peace with God. It is the angel of God, in every affliction, that galls a convinced person. To be quit of this, men resolve, at such times, against their sins. Sin shall never more have any place in them ; they will never again give up themselves to the service of it. Accordingly sin is quiet, stirs not, seems to be mortified ; not indeed that it has received any one wound, but merely because the soul hath possessed its

faculties whereby it should exert itself, with thoughts inconsistent with the motions thereof; which, when they are laid aside, sin returns again to its former life and vigour. Of this we have a full instance in Psa. lxxviii. 32—38. *For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wonderous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When he slew them, then they sought him : and they returned and enquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant.* I no way doubt but that when they sought and returned, and inquired earnestly after God, they did it with full purpose of heart, as to the relinquishment of their sins. This is expressed in the word *returned*. To *turn*, or *return* unto the Lord is by a relinquishment of sin. And this they did *early*, with earnestness and diligence ; but yet their sin was unmortified for all this, ver. 36, 37 : and this is the state of many humiliations in the days of affliction, and a great deceit in the hearts of believers themselves lies oftentimes herein."*

When a professor of religion has fallen into some odious vice, and wishes to shelter himself from the censures of his connexions, you will often hear him allege, " I have *repented :*" whereas it amounts to little more than the shame and alarm above described, as his after conduct very frequently proves. Indeed it is not of the nature of true repentance to *talk* of having repented, and especially for the purpose of evading a faithful censure.

Fifthly : *Though we should refrain from the open practice of the sin, and that for a continuance; yet if it be merely from prudential or selfish considerations*, we may be certain that we have not yet repented of it.—Though we had no religion, and pretended to none, we might find various inducements to refrain from gross immoralities. They affect our interest, our health, and our reputation : It is on such principles that mere worldly men will guard against them ; and if we act from the same motives, wherein are

* On *The Mortification of Sin in Believers.* Chap. V.

we better than they ? Or if the dread of future punishment may be supposed to have some influence upon us, this is a very different thing from the fear of the Lord, which is to *hate* evil. And where the motives for abstaining from any evil are merely prudential, or selfish, we shall abstain from very little more than that which falls under the eye of creatures. Our watchfulness will respect little, if any thing, more than outward actions. The daily, care of our lives will be, not how we shall please God, but how we shall conceal the prevailing disposition of our hearts from those about us—a task this as difficult as it is mean ; for whatever occupies our thoughts and affections, will, on various occasions, not withstanding our utmost care, escape us. Looks, gestures, manner of speaking and acting, as well as words and deeds themselves, betray what is predominant within. Hence it is that we generally deceive ourselves in these matters. We often fancy our character to be unknown when it is well known : and if it were otherwise, all is naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Of this we may be certain, that while our chief concern is to hide our sins from those about us, should we be summoned to give an account of our stewardship, it will appear that we *have sinned and not repented of our deeds ;* and wherein this differs from going down to the grave *with our guilt upon our heads*, it is difficult to say.

Sixthly : *If we take pleasure in talking of the evil, or in dwelling upon it in our thoughts,* it is a certain sign of the same thing. True repentance works in a way of silent shame and self-abasement : *That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.* When men can talk, and even write of their former wicked courses with lightness, it is a certain proof that, whatever repentance they have had, they do not *at present* repent of it ; and though nothing be said or written, yet if such things occupy our thoughts, imaginations, and affections, it is much the same. A mind full of this must needs be *lacking* of those spiritual exercises which render us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; and those that are

such are fitly enough described as having *forgotten that they were purged from their old sins*. If old sins are thought of with new delight, they are reacted and persisted in ; and where this continues to be the case, the guilt of them must remain upon us, and may be found upon our heads when we go down to the grave.

Lastly : *If we trifle with temptation, or be not afraid of putting ourselves in the way of it, or even of being led into it*, we may be certain that at present we have not repented of our sin.—It is a saying almost grown into a proverb, He that is not afraid of temptation is not afraid of sin ; and he that is not afraid of sin, must needs be in danger of being destroyed by it. If, after having been repeatedly drawn into sin, by associating in certain companies, or certain pursuits, we can, nevertheless, run into them again without fear, we cannot possibly have repented of our deeds. Nay more, though we should fear to plunge ourselves into temptation, yet, if when providence brings us into such situations and companies, our hearts secretly rejoice in it, this is no less an evidence of our impenitent state than the other. True repentance will not only teach us to shun the way of evil, but to be averse to every avenue that leads to it. If, therefore, we either run into temptation, or are glad when we are led into it, we are, beyond all doubt, under the power of it.

ON THE

INJURIOUS AND DANGEROUS EFFECTS

OF

SIN LYING UPON THE CONSCIENCE UNLAMENTED.

It is a dangerous thing to fall into sin, whether secretly or openly ; and the effects of it, sooner or later, will certainly be felt : but to continue in it is much more so. A very heavy threatening is denounced against God's open enemies for their *persisting* in sin : *God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as* GOETH ON STILL *in his trespasses.* But the same thing, in persons who have known the way of righteousness, must be abundantly more offensive. *He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?* There is a remedy at hand of God's providing ; a *propitiation* for our sins ; and it is declared, *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* But if, instead ot confessing our sins on the head of this propitiation, and imploring mercy in his name, we sink into hardness of heart, neglect prayer, shun the company of the faithful, and efface the remembrance of one sin only by the commission of another, what have we to expect ?

I am aware that it is one of the devices of Satan, after having drawn a soul from God, and entangled him in the net of his own corruptions, to persuade him that the prayer of faith, in his circumstances, would be presumption ; and that it is much more modest and becoming for him to stand aloof, both from God and his people. And if by faith were meant what some would seem to understand by it, a working up ourselves into a persuasion that,

owing to the immutability of God, all is safe and right, whatever be our spirit or conduct, it would be presumptuous enough : but genuine faith in Christ is never out of season. The greater our sin has been, the greater reason there is for us to confess it upon the head of the gospel sacrifice, and to plead for mercy in his name. We may not be able to go as Christians : but this affords no reason why we should not go as sinners.

The injury and danger of such a state of mind will appear from a consideration of the *effects* which it produces, and must continue to produce, if not healed by a return to God by Jesus Christ.

First : *It will necessarily deprive us of all true enjoyment in religion, and by consequence, of all that preservation to the heart and mind which such enjoyment affords.*—The principal sources of enjoyment to a Christian that walketh spiritually, are communion with God and his people : but to him that is out of the way, these streams are dried up ; or, which is the same thing in effect to him, they are so impeded as not to reach him. Guilt, shame, darkness, and defilement have taken possession of the soul ; love is quenched, hope clouded, joy fled, prayer restrained, and every other grace enervated. It becomes the holiness of God to frown upon us under such a state of mind, by withholding the light of his countenance ; and, if it were otherwise, we have no manner of desire after it. Such was the state of David after he had sinned, and before he had repented : the *joys of God's salvation* were far from him. The thirty-second and thirty-eighth Psalms appear to have been written, as has already been observed, after his recovery : but he there describes what was the state of his mind previously to it. There is much meaning in what he sets out with, in the first of these Psalms : *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.—Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile !* He knew the contrary of this, by bitter experience. Guilt and defilement had eaten up all his enjoyment. *When I kept silence*, saith he *my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long ; for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me : my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.* It does not appear that he fully desisted from prayer ; but there was none of that freedom in it which he was

wont to enjoy. It was *roaring*, rather than praying; and God is represented as disregarding it. In the thirty-eighth Psalm, he speaks of the *rebukes* of God's wrath, and the *chastening of his hot displeasure;* of his *arrows sticking fast in him*, and *his hand pressing him sore;* of there being *no soundness in his flesh, because of his anger;* nor *rest in his bones, because of his sin.* There is one expression exceedingly appropriate: *My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness.* A wound may be dangerous at the time of its being received; but much more so if it be neglected till the humours of the body are drawn towards it. In this case, it is hard to be healed; and the patient has not only to reflect on his heedlessness in first exposing himself to danger, but on his *foolishness* in so long neglecting the prescribed remedy. Such was the state of his mind, till, as he informs us, he *acknowledged his transgressions, and was sorry for his sin.*

And, as there can be no communion with God, so neither can there be any *with his people*, If our sin be known, it must naturally occasion a reservedness, if not an exclusion from their society. Or if it be unknown, we shall be equally unable to enjoy communion with them. Guilt in our consciences will beget shame, and incline us rather to stand aloof than to come near them; or if we go into their company, it will prove a bar to freedom. There is something, at first sight, rather singular in the language of the apostle John; but, upon close inspection, it will be found to be perfectly just: *If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.*

But if we are deprived of fellowship with God and his people, from what can we derive consolation? If we have only had a name to live, and been dead, the joy arising from vain hope may possibly be supplied by carnal pleasures. We may drown reflection, by busying ourselves in worldly pursuits, mingling with worldly company, and, in short, returning *like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*: but if we have any true religion in us, we cannot do this; and then what is there under the sun that can yield us relief?

Nor shall we be deprived merely of the enjoyments of religion, but of all that *preservation* to the soul which they afford. The *peace of God* is represented as that which *keeps*, or fortifies, *our hearts and minds*. Without this, the *heart* will be in perpetual danger of being seduced by the wiles, or sunk by the pressures of this world; and the *mind* of being drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel.

Secondly: *It will render us useless in our generation.*—The great end of existence with a good man, is to live with him who died for us and rose again. If God bless us, it is that, like Abraham, we may be blessings to others. Christians are said to be the salt of the earth, and the light of the world; but while we are in the state above described, we are as *salt that has lost its savour*, which is *good for nothing;* or as a light that is hid under a vessel. Of what use, with respect to religion, are we in our families while this is the case? Neither servants nor children can think well of religion, from any thing they see in us; and when we go into the world, and mingle among mankind in our dealings, in whose conscience does our conversation or behaviour plant conviction? Where is the man, who, on leaving our company, has been compelled by it to acknowledge the reality of religion? Or, if we occupy a station in the church of God, (and this character may belong to a minister no less than to another man,) we shall do little or no good in it; but be as *vessels in which the Lord taketh no pleasure.* There is a threatening directed against vain pastors, which ought to make a minister tremble. *Wo to the idol shepherd, that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.* Perhaps one of the greatest temptations to backsliding in ministers may lie in this way: being selected from their brethren, and chosen to the office of public instructors, they are in danger of indulging in self-valuation. A man may labour night and day in his study, and all to get accomplished, that he may shine before the people. Where this is the case, the preacher is his own *idol*, and it may be that of the people. He feels also little or no regard to the charge which he has undertaken, but is ready to desert it whenever a difficulty arises, or any opportunity offers of im-

proving his circumstances. The consequence is, that the sword of the Lord is upon *his arm*—he does no manner of execution in his work; and upon his *right eye*—whatever proficiency he may make in science, or polite accomplishments, he has but little if any spiritual understanding in the things of God. This character may respect ungodly preachers, such to whom the Jewish nation were given up for their rejection of Christ; but there is no sin committed by the most ungodly man of which the most godly is not in danger.

Thirdly: *We shall not only be useless, but injurious to the cause of Christ.*—Indeed, it is impossible to stand neuter in this cause. If we do no good, we shall do harm; not only as cumberers of the ground occupying that place in society which might be better filled by others, but as giving a false representation of religion, and diffusing a savour of death among mankind. If our domestics infer nothing favourable to religion from our conduct in the family, they will infer something unfavourable; and if there be but little good to be seen in our example, it is well if there be not much evil; and this will surely be imitated. Who can calculate what influence the treachery, unchastity and murder, committed by David, had upon his family? We know that each was acted over again by Amnon and Absalom. And thus many a parent has seen his own sins repeated in his posterity; and perhaps if he had lived longer, might have seen them multiplied still more to his shame and confusion.

The servants of God are called to bear testimony for him: *Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord of hosts.* This is done not merely by words, but by deeds. There is a way of bearing witness to the reality and importance of religion, by a zealous perseverance in it; to its dignity, by our firmness; to its happy influence, by contentedness and cheerfulness; and to its purity, by being holy in all manner of conversation: and this is a kind of testimony which is more regarded than any other. Men in common, form their opinion of religion more by what they see in the professors of it, than by the profession itself. Hence it was that David by his *deed* is said to have *given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.* They were not contented with reproaching him,

but must speak against God and religion on his account. In this view he considered his sin when he was brought to repentance for it. *Against* THEE, THEE *only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.—Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.* If his sin had not greatly dishonoured God's name, and, as it were, broken down the walls of Zion, such language would not have appeared among his lamentations. Things operate much the same to this day. Whatever evil is done by a professor, it is ascribed to his religion. In this view we may justly consider our unchristian conduct as bearing false witness of God; for it is giving false representations of his gospel and government to the world. A grasping, selfish spirit is saying to those around us, that after all which we have professed of living by faith in a portion beyond death, the present world is the best, and therefore we are for making sure of that, and running all hazards as to the other. In like manner, a cruel and revengeful disposition towards those who have offended us, is saying, that Christianity, after all its professions of meekness and forgiveness of injuries, renders its adherents no better than others. And when a Christian professor is detected of having privately indulged in the lusts of the flesh, the conclusion that is drawn from it is, that there is nothing in religion but outside appearance, and that in secret religious people are the same as others. It is impossible to say how much such conduct operates to the hardening of men in sin, to the quenching of their covictions, to the weakening the hands of God's servants, and to the stumbling of persons who are inquiring the way to Zion.

These things, if we be mere professors, may have but little effect upon us. We may not care for God's being dishonoured, provided we do but get pardoned at last: but if there be any true religion about us, it will be otherwise. An ingenuous mind will feel more for the dishonour which he has done to Christ, and injury to his fellow-creatures, than for the reproach which he has brought upon himself.

Fourthly: *We are in the utmost danger of falling into future temptations, and so of sinking deeper, and falling farther from God.*—So long as sin remains upon the conscience unlamented, it

is like poison in the constitution: it will be certain to operate; and that in a way that shall go on more and more to kill all holy resolution, to harden the heart, and to defile the imaginations and desires. *Whoredom and wine, and new wine, take away the heart.* It was from sad experience of the defiling nature of past sin that David, when he came to himself, prayed, *Create in me a* CLEAN HEART, *O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

A mind thus enfeebled, stupified, and defiled, must needs be in a very unfit condition to resist new temptations. The inhabitants of a besieged city, who are weakened by famine and disease, and discouraged by a number of disaffected persons within their walls, have no heart to resist, but stand ready to listen to the first proposals of the besiegers.

And in proportion as we are disabled for resistance, it may be expected that the tempter will renew his attempts upon us. If Satan have any influence upon the human mind, it may be supposed that he acts with design, and knows how to avail himself of the most favourable seasons to effect his purpose. And this we find to be true by experience. In proportion as we have yielded to temptation, it will rise in its demands; solicitations, greater in number and in force, will ply to our minds. As a resistance of the devil will be followed by his *fleeing from us*, so, on the contrary, a non-resistance of him will be followed by renewed and stronger attempts upon us. One sin makes way for another, and renders us less able to resist, or to return to God by repentance. When once the thief has gained admission into our habitation, he will bid us defiance. *Innumerable evils will compass us about, and our iniquities take hold upon us, so that we shall not be able to look up: they will be more than the hairs of our heads: therefore our hearts will fail us.* Sampson first yielded to his sensual desires; after this to the entreaties of his Delilah; who, in proportion as she saw him pliant to her wishes, increased in her assiduousness, till, at length, he lost his hair, his liberty, his eyes, and his life.

If we be mere professors these considerations may affect us but little: we shall continue the willing slaves of our own corruptions, hoping it may be, nevertheless, that we shall sometime be brought back again, till, at some unexpected hour, we are taken out of the

world. But if there be any good thing in us toward the Lord God of Israel, this part of the subject must alarm us; for of all the methods which God takes to punish sin, there is none more awful and more dreaded by a good man, than that of being given *up to sin.*

Fifthly: *So long as sin remains upon the conscience unlamented, we are in danger of eternal damnation.* It may be thought by some, that such language is inconsistent with the final perseverance of believers: but it is manifest that our Lord did not so teach the doctrine of perseverance as to render cautions of this nature unnecessary. He did not scruple to declare, even to his own disciples, that whosoever should say to his brother, Thou fool, should be in danger of hell fire—that if they forgave not men their trespasses, neither would God forgive theirs—and if a right hand or a right eye, caused them to offend, it must be cut off, or plucked out and that, lest the whole body should be cast into hell.

The object at which sin aims, whether in believers or unbelievers, is *death, eternal death;* and to this it has a natural and direct tendency. The apostle James in a very affecting manner, describes its process. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.* If it does not in all cases come to this issue, it is not because of its being different as to its nature or tendency in some persons, to what it is in others, but because a timely stop is put to its operations. Only let it go on without repentance till it has finished its work, and eternal death will be the issue.

Whatever we are, so long as sin lies unlamented upon the conscience, we have no scriptural foundation to conclude that we are Christians. No real Christian, it is true will prove an apostate; yet while we are under the influence of sin, we are moving in the direction which leads to apostacy. If we are contented with a relapsed state of mind, what ground can we have to conclude that it is not our element, or that we have ever been the subjects of true religion? If the waters continue to be naught, it is a sign

that the spring has not been healed. There is no reason to think that Judas himself laid his accounts with such an issue of his treachery as actually came to pass. During the ministry of our Lord, while he kept the bag, and sometimes made free with its contents, it is probable he nevertheless reckoned himself a good man. He saw many failings in his fellow disciples, and in all other good men; and he might think this to be his. When he had covenanted with the chief priests, it does not appear that he expected his master would be eventually taken and crucified. When they were about to lay hands on him, he had often passed through the midst of them, and gone his way; and he might suppose that it would be so again. *When therefore he saw that he was condemned*, he was thrown into a state of terrible amazement, and in the issue went and *hanged himself*. Such was the process of an apostate, and such his end. Surely it behoves us to take heed how we trifle with those things, the end of which is death!

ON THE

MEANS OF RECOVERY.

Were it not for the hope of being instrumental in saving some from the error of their way, and of inducing others to a greater degree of watchfulness, I should not have written the preceding pages. It can afford no satisfaction to expose the evil conduct of a fellow sinner, or to trace its dangerous effects, unless it be with a view to his salvation or preservation.

It is natural for those who have fallen into sin, unless they be given up to a rejection of all religion, to wish, on some consideration to be restored. A backsliding state is far from being agreeable. Hence it is that many have prematurely grasped at the promise of forgiveness, and said to their souls, *Peace, peace, when there was no peace.* It is desirable that we be recovered from our backslidings; but it is not desirable that we should think ourselves recovered when we are not so.

As there are many ways by which a convinced sinner seeks peace to his soul, without being able to find it, so it is with a backslider. Self-righteous attempts to mortify sin, and gain peace with God, are not confined to the first period of religious concern. Having, through the power of alarm, desisted from the open practice of sin, many have laboured to derive comfort from this consideration, without confessing their sin on the head, as it were, of the gospel sacrifice. Their sins may be said rather to have been *worn* away from their remembrance by length of time, than *washed* by the blood of the cross. But this is not recovery: the hurt, if healed, is healed slightly; and may be expected to break out again. The same way in which, if we be true Christians, we first found rest to our souls, must be pursued in order to recover it; namely, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is the way to which the scriptures uniformly direct us. *My little children, these things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* This was the way in which David was recovered. He confessed his sin with deep contrition, pleading to be purged *with hyssop, that he might be clean, and washed that he might be whiter than snow.* By this language he could not mean that his sin should be purged away by any thing pertaining to the ceremonial law, for that law made no provision for the pardon of his crimes : he must, therefore, intend that which the sprinkling of the unclean with a bunch of hyssop, dipt in the water of purification was designed to prefigure ; which, as we are taught in the New Testament, was the *purging of the conscience, by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.*

This is the only way in which it is possible to find rest to our souls. As there is no other name given under heaven, or among men, by which we can be saved, so neither is there any other by which we can be restored. Whatever be the nature of our backsliding from God, this must be the remedy. If it be a *relinquishment of evangelical principles*, we must return to the way, even the high-way whither we went. Paul *travailed in birth* for the recovery of the Galatians ; and in what did he expect it to consist? In *Christ being formed in them.* He also strove to bring back the Hebrews ; and all his labours were directed to the same point. His epistle to them is full of *Christ*, and of warnings and cautions against neglecting and rejecting him. If any man have been perplexed concerning the deity or atonement of Christ, let him humbly and carefully read that epistle ; and if his heart be right with God, it will do him good. If our departure from God have issued in *some gross immorality*, or in *the love of the world*, or in *conformity to it*, the remedy must be the same. It is by this medium if at all, that the world will be crucified unto us, and we unto the world. If we have no heart to repent, and return to God by Jesus Christ, we are yet in our sins, and may expect to reap the fruits of them. The scriptures give no counsel to any thing short of this. They are not wanting, however, in drections that may

lead to it, and considerations that may induce it. What these are, I shall now proceed to inquire.

In general, I may observe, The scriptures assure us of *the exceeding great and tender mercy of God, and of his willingness to forgive all those who return to him in the name of his Son.*—It is necessary that we be well persuaded of this truth, lest, instead of applying as supplicants, we sink into despair. If an awakened sinner, under his first religious concern, be in danger of this species of despondency, a backslider is still more so. His transgressions are much more heinous in their circumstances than those of the other, having been committed under greater light, and against greater goodness: and when to this is added the treatment which his conduct must necessarily draw upon him from his religious connexions, he may be tempted to relinquish all hopes of recovery, and to consider himself as an outcast of both God and man. Unhappy man! Thy breach may be *great like the sea*, and the language of an awakened conscience may suggest, *Who can heal me?* Yet do not despair. *Hear what God the Lord will speak. He will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly.* Hear what he speaks to the backsliding Israelites, reduced by their sins to the most deplorable state of guilt and wretchedness. *The Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the works of men's hands; but if* FROM THENCE *thou shall seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart, and with all thy soul: when thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice, (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God,) he will not forsake thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them.* The pardoning mercy of God towards those who return to him by Jesus Christ, is not limited by such measures as are framed by creatures in their treatment of one another, or by such expectations as, on this account, they are apt to form. There are circumstances which may render it almost impossible for forgiveness to be exercised among men; and therefore men are ready to think it must be so with respect to God. But *with the Lord*

there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption. He will not only pardon, but pardon ABUNDANTLY : *for his thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.—The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from* ALL SIN.—*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from* ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. The threatenings against the *unpardonable sin* itself do not affect the truth of these merciful declarations : for that sin is all along described as excluding repentance as well as forgiveness.* The party is supposed to be given up to hardness of heart. If, therefore, we confess our sin with contrition, we may be certain it is not unpardonable, and that we shall obtain mercy through the blood of the cross.

But the great question is, *How shall we repent of our sins, and return to God by Jesus Christ?*—Undoubtedly it is much easier to get out of the way than to get in again ; to lose the peace of our minds than to recover it. Sin is of a hardening nature ; and the farther we have proceeded in it, the more inextricable are its chains. But however this be, we either do desire to return, or we do not. If not, it will be in vain to address any directions to us. It is right indeed, for the servants of Christ to point them out, whether we will hear, or whether we will forbear, and there leave them ; but as to any hope of our recovery, while such is the state of our minds, there can be none. If we can think of our sin without grief, and of the cross of Christ without any meltings of spirit, there is great reason to fear that our *hearts are not right in the sight of God ;* but that we are yet in the *gall of bitterness, and the bonds of iniquity.* If, on the other hand, we do desire to return ; if like Israel in the days of Samuel, we *lament after the Lord*, we shall readily hearken to every direction given us in his word.

If my reader, supposing him to have backslidden from God, be in such a state of mind, it is with a mixture of hope and tenderness that I attempt to point out to him the means of recovery. Or should it even be otherwise, I will, nevertheless endeavour to

* Heb, vi. 6.

show him the good and the right way, that at least I may deliver my own soul.

First : *Embrace every possible season of retirement for reading the holy scriptures, especially those parts which are suited to thy case; and accompany it with prayer.*—God's word hid in the heart, is not only a preservative against sin, but a restorative from it. It both wounds and heals : if it rebukes, it is with the faithfulness of a friend ; or if it consoles, its consolations carry in them an implication, which if properly understood, will melt us into repentance.

Read especially *those parts of scripture which are addressed to persons in your situation*, as the second chapter of Jeremiah : or which expresses the desires of a returning sinner, as the twenty-fifth, thirty-second, thirty-eighth, fifty-first, and hundred-and-thirtieth Psalms. You may not be able to adopt all this language as your own : but it may be useful nevertheless. To read the genuine expressions of a contrite heart may produce at least a conviction of the disparity between the frame of mind possessed by the writer and yourself ; and such a conviction may be accompanied with a sensation of shame and grief.

It is also of importance that you read the scriptures *by yourself.* To read a portion of them in your families is right, and ought not to be neglected ; but there is a wide difference, as to personal advantage, between this and reading them alone. Your mind may then be more at liberty for reflection ; you can read, and pause, and think, and apply the subject to your case.

It is of still greater importance to *unite prayer with it.* Reading the word of God and prayer, are duties which mutually assist each other : the one furnishes us with confessions, pleas, and arguments ; while the other promotes solemnity and spirituality of mind, which goes farther towards understanding the scriptures, than a library of expositions.

It was in one of these seasons of retirement that David put up this petition, *I have gone astray like a lost sheep : seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.* He seems to have had in his thoughts the condition of a poor, wandering sheep, that had left the flock, and the rich pastures whither it was wont to be led ; ranging rather like a native of the woods, than one which had been

used to be led, and fed, and protected by an owner. Bewildered by its own wanderings, entangled in the thorns and briers of the wilderness, and exposed to beasts of prey, it feels its forlorn condition, and bleats after the shepherd of the flock! Is there nothing in this that may suit thy case? Yes, thou art the man! Thou hast gone astray like a lost sheep, got entangled in thine own corruptions, and knowest not how to find the way back: yet it may be thou hast not *forgotten his commandments*, nor utterly lost the savour of those happy days when walking in them. Let thy prayer then be directed, like that of the Psalmist, to the good Shepherd of the sheep, *Seek thy servant!*

Prayer is a kind of religious exercise which is necessary to accompany all others. *In every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.* Solemn approaches to God are adapted to impress the mind with a sense of sin, and to inspire us with self-abhorrence on account of it. It was by a view of the holiness of God that Isaiah felt himself to be *a man of unclean lips;* and by conversing with him that Job was brought to *abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes.* The very exercise of prayer carries in it an implication that *our help must come from above;* a truth which, in all cases, it is highly necessary for us to know, and with which, in this case especially, we cannot be too deeply impressed. We easily get out of the way; but if ever we return to it, it must be by his influence who *restoreth our souls, and leadeth us in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake.*

To tell a person who is out of the way, that he has no help in himself, and that if ever he get in again it must be by the restoring grace of God, may seem, to some people, paradoxical and disheartening: but it is a truth, and a truth which, if properly understood and felt, would go farther towards our recovery than we at first may apprehend. Paul found that *when he was weak then he was strong;* and many others have found the same. The more we are emptied of self-sufficiency, the more sensibly shall we feel our dependence, and the more importunately implore that the Lord would save us as it were from ourselves, and restore us *for his name's sake.*

This was the way in which we at first found rest for our souls and this must be the way in which we recover it. An awakened sinner frequently labours hard after peace, without being able to obtain it. Wherefore? Because he seeks it, not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law, stumbling at that stumbling-stone. In all his labours there is a large portion of self-righteous hope, or an idea that God will pity him on account of his painful endeavours to please him. But this is like bad flesh in a wound, which must be eaten out before it can be healed. If ever he obtain peace, it must be by utterly despairing of all help from himself, and falling as a sinner entirely lost, into the arms of sovereign mercy. This is *walking in the good old way*, which brings *rest to the soul;* and the same sense of our insufficiency which is necessary to find rest in the first instance is equally necessary to find it in all that follow.

We may pray from year to year, and all without effect. It is only *the prayer of faith* that succeeds; the distinguishing characteristic of which is, under a sense of their being no help in us, to lay hold of the mercy and faithfulness of God, as revealed in the gospel. David for a time *groaned*, and even *roared, by reason of the disquietness of his heart:* but he obtained no relief from this. On the contrary, he sunk deeper and deeper into despondency. At length, he betook him to another *manner* of praying. *Out of the* DEPTHS CRIED I UNTO THEE . . . . *and thou heardest my voice!* We find him here pleading the exceeding *greatness of God's mercy*, and the *plenteousness of his redemption.* Here he found rest for his soul!—Jonah also, for a time, was in much the same state. With a conscience so far awakened as to deprive him of all enjoyment, he retired to the bottom of the ship; and, wearied with the load of his guilt, slept away his time. Even the horror of a tempest did not awaken him. At length, being roused, and reproved by heathens, and marked out by lot as the guilty person, he confesses who he is, and what he had done, and advises them to cast him into the sea. Humanity, for a time, struggles with the elements, but in vain; he must be cast away. Think what a state of mind he must at this time have possessed. He is thrown into the deep, is swallowed by a fish, and retains his reason even in that situation; but no light shines upon his soul. Conceiving himself to be on the

point of expiring, his heart sighed within him, *I am cast out of thy sight!* But ere the thought had well passed his mind, another struck him . . . . *Yet will I look again towards thy holy temple!* He looked and was lightened: *Out of the belly of hell cried I unto thee, and thou heardest my voice!*

Secondly: *Reflect on the aggravating circumstances of thine offences, or on those things which render it* AN EVIL AND BITTER THING *to have departed from the living God, and to have sinned against him in the manner thou hast done.*—Every return to God begins with reflection. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. Commune with thine own heart upon thy bed, and be still.* 'If the God against whom I have sinned had been like the idols of this world, I might have been justified in departing from him: but I have acted the part of the backsliding Israelites, who were the only people who had a God worth cleaving to, and yet were the only people distinguished by their fickleness. The world cleave close enough to their gods, which yet are no gods; but I have committed these two evils at which the heavens are astonished: I have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed to myself cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water! If the service of the Lord had been a heavy yoke, and if the way of his commandments had been an unfruitful and miserable path, I might have some plea for deserting it: but what have I gained, except guilt, and shame, and wretchedness, by leaving him? Was he a barren wilderness to me, or a land of darkness? How can I answer his tender, yet cutting expostulations—*O my people, what have I done unto thee; wherein have I wearied thee; testify against me!*

'If I had been born and educated a benighted Pagan, a deluded Mahometan, or a superstitious Papist; if the oracles of God had been withheld from me: or if I had lived all my days in a state of ignorance and insensibility, like multitudes in my native country, the sins that I have committed had been little in comparison of what they now are. I have verged near to the unpardonable sin. It is against *light* and *love* that I have offended. He has been as a husband unto me; but I have forsaken him, and have gone after other lovers. Yet he still invites me to return . . . . . And what hindereth? I am not straitened in him, but in my own bowels.

Lord save me from myself! *Surely I will return to my first husband, for then it was better with me than now.*'

Thirdly; *Reflect on the goodness of God, in having hitherto borne with thee, and prevented thy sins from fully operating according to their native tendency.*—It is a common observation, that one sin leads to another. Of this, history and experience furnish many tragical examples. The sauntering indolence of David occasioned his adultery. Adultery, when committed, must be concealed, and this leads to treachery and intrigue. When these fail, recourse is had to murder. And when the murder is effected, to carry on the concealment, the event must be attributed to providence—*The sword devoureth one as well as another!* The connexion between uncleanness and blood is strongly marked in the history of human crimes. A large proportion of those who have been publicly executed for the one, were induced to perpetrate the horrid deed as a covert to the other. And hast thou been tampering with these vices; playing at the hole of the cockatrice den? How is it that death and hell have not ere now swallowed thee up? Behold that wretch who went but yesterday to suffer the just vengeance of his country, for having murdered the object whom he had first seduced; to see what thou mightest have been! Is it not owing to singular mercy that thy sins have been restrained from their wonted and deadly issues?

It may be, some who have been companions, or at least cotemporaries, with thee in the first stages of sin, have meanwhile been suffered to make more rapid progress. Their follies have ended in infamy, while thine have been restrained, and comparatively hid. And it is possible, while the public voice has been raised against them, thou has joined it. *And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* If the recollection of such things leadeth thee not to repentance, it is a dark sign of *a hard and impenitent heart, treasuring up to itself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

Fourthly: *Reflect on the state and exercises of thy mind in former times.*—This was the counsel of the apostle to the Hebrews, who, disheartened by persecution, were half inclined to go back again to Judaism: *Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after that ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.* This was the counsel of our Lord himself, to the churches of Ephesus and Sardis: *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent.—Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.* Ask thine own soul, 'Are there no seasons of tenderness in my life which it would be for my profit to recal to mind? I have professed repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; and was it only a profession? Was there not a time when my sins were more bitter to me than death, and more dreaded than hell? How is it that I have turned again to folly? Has sin changed its nature or become less odious? Rather is not the change in me? Was there not a time when the word of the Lord was precious to my soul; when my sabbaths were my happiest days, and godly people my chosen companions? Whence this lamentable change? Is Christ or the gospel less precious than heretofore? I once thought that if I might but be found in him, and live forever with him, and those that love him, I should not care what I lost or suffered in the present world. And was I all this time deceiving myself? Were my repentance, and faith, and hope, and love, and joy, all counterfeit? I endured reproaches and losses, as I supposed, for his name sake; and is it all *in vain?* Must I at last be separated for ever from him, and have my portion with unbelievers? "O Lord, have mercy upon me a most wretched caitiff, and miserable sinner! I have offended both against heaven and earth, more than my tongue can express! Whither then may I go, or whither shall I flee? To heaven I may be ashamed to lift up mine eyes, and on earth I find no place of refuge or succour. To THEE, therefore, O Lord, do I run: TO THEE do I humble myself. O Lord, my God, my sins are great; but yet have mercy upon me, for thy great mercy. The great mystery, that God became man, was not wrought for small ar few offences. Thou didst not give thy Son unto death for little sins only; but for all the greatest sins of the world, so that the sinner returns to thee with his whole

heart, as I do here at this present. Wherefore have mercy on me, O God, whose property is always to have mercy. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for thy great mercy. O Lord, I crave nothing for my own merits, but for thy name's sake, that it might be hallowed thereby, and for thy dear Son Jesus Christ's sake."*

This part of our Lord's counsel would apply not only to those who have fallen into gross immoralities, but to such as have deserted *the principles of the gospel.* It was asked the Galatians, through what medium it was that they first *received the Spirit; by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith.* This question proceeds upon the principle of that being the true doctrine which is productive of the best effects; and by the manner in which it is introduced, *This* ONLY *would I learn of you*, it is intimated that the solution is of *itself* sufficient to determine what the true doctrine is. And what are the effects produced by a relinquishment of the doctrines usually denominated evangelical? Nay, I might say, by only a hesitation concerning them? I appeal to those who have made the trial. Have you the same joy and peace in believing your present principles, as you had in your former ones? Can you, or do you, go to a throne of grace with the same holy freedom as heretofore? Do you feel an equal concern for the salvation of your poor ungodly neighbours? Rather is not the far greater part of your zeal consumed in labouring to make proselytes of serious Christians to your new way of thinking? Does the society of those who are like-minded with yourself, afford that inward satisfaction which you once enjoyed in the fellowship of those whom you are now taught to pity as enthusiasts? If, while professing these things, you were strangers to them, you may answer these questions in the affirmative: but if otherwise, you will not. *Remember from whence you are fallen, and repent! Remember how you have received and heard, and hold fast and repent.*

Fifthly: *Set apart special times to humble yourself before God*

* That which is included in double reversed commas, is a part of the prayer of Archbishop Cranmer; who, through fear of man had denied his faith, but was, notwithstanding, burned to death. When brought to execution, (which was at Oxford, on March 21, 1556,) he uttered the above prayer; and on the flames approaching him, first thrust into the fire the hand with which he had signed his recantation.

by fasting and prayer.—Extraordinary cases require the use of extraordinary means. When a great army was coming against Jehoshaphat, it is said, *he feared, and* SET HIMSELF *to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.* But the loss of the soul is of more account to you than the temporal overthrow of a country was to him. When Judah, for its backslidings, was under the frowns of God in Babylon, and had been so for about seventy years, Daniel says, I SET MY FACE *unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.* The apostle Paul plainly intimates that there are times wherein we are required to *give ourselves to fasting and prayer.* And surely there can be no times in which these means are more necessary than when we have got out of the way, and desire to recover it. There is much meaning in the words, *He* SET HIMSELF *to seek the Lord;* and *I* SET MY FACE *unto the Lord God.* They denote something more than the ordinary exercises of prayer; even a special fixedness of the thoughts, purposes, and desires to a particular object: and God has usually honoured those extraordinary approaches to him, when influenced by a pure motive, with success. It is true, we may attend to duty in a superstitious, or self-righteous spirit; resting in it as an end, instead of using it as a mean; but this is not *setting our face unto the Lord God*, or *seeking him.* A day devoted to God in humiliation, fasting, and prayer, occasionally occupied with reading suitable parts of the holy scriptures, may, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, contribute more to the subduing of sin, and the recovery of a right mind, than years spent in a sort of half-hearted exercises.

Sixthly: *To prayer it is necessary to add watchfulness.*—Our Lord unites these together as an antidote against temptation. It has sometimes been one of the devices of Satan, after a backslider has been drawing near to God, and strongly soliciting for mercy: yea, after a time has been set apart for this particular purpose, to ply him afresh with some powerful temptation; and while his mind has been unsuspicious, and, it may be, thinking itself to be somewhat secure, on account of having so lately been engaged in earnest devotion, he has been surprised and overcome! The consequence as might be expected, has been a future neglect of prayer, under the idea that it must have been mere hypocrisy before, and would now be

adding sin to sin. Instead of depending upon spiritual frames for preservation, and especially when they are over, perhaps we ought to expect that our comforts should be succeeded by conflicts. We know it was so in several cases recorded in the scriptures. Immediately after drinking at the smitten rock at Rephidim, Israel was called to fight with Amalek. Paul's thorn in the flesh succeeded to extraordinary revelations. Our Lord himself went up from Jordan into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

Seventhly: *In your approaches to the Saviour, let it be under the character in which you first applied to him for mercy, that of a* SINNER.—If you attempt to approach the throne of grace as a good man who has backslidden from God, you may find it impossible to support that character. The reality of your conversion may be doubtful, not only in your apprehension, but in itself. Your approach, therefore, must not be as one that *is washed, and needeth not, save to wash his feet*: but as one who is defiled throughout, *whose hands and head*, and every part needs to be cleansed. Do not employ yourself in raking over the rubbish of your past life in search of evidence that you are a Christian. You will not be able in your present state of mind, to decide that question: nor would it be of any service to you if you could decide it. One thing is certain; you are *a sinner*, a poor miserable and perishing sinner: the door of mercy is open; and you are welcome to enter in. Let your past character then have been what it may, and let your conversion be ever so doubtful, if you can *from this time* relinquish all for Christ, eternal life is before you.

The Laodiceans, who, though composing a Christian church, were doubtful characters, are counselled to deal with Christ in the same manner as *sinners* deal with him, for *riches*, for *righteousness*, and for heavenly *wisdom*.

Lastly: *In all your supplications, be contented with nothing short of a complete recovery*.—It is possible you may obtain so much ascendency over your evil propensities that they may seem to be slain before you; or at least, that you are in no particular danger of yielding to them any more; and yet you may not have recovered that holy rest in God, that sweet peace which arises from

confessing our sins upon the head of the gospel sacrifice. But while this is the case there is no security against their revival. The first temptation by which you are assaulted may afford lamentable proof that they are yet alive. Nothing will serve as a preservative against the risings of evil propensities short of *walking with God*. There is much important truth in that declaration of the Apostle, *This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh*. Sin is not to be opposed so much directly as indirectly; not by mere resistance, but by opposing other principles to it, which shall overcome it. It is not by contending with the fire, especially with combustible materials about us, that we shall be able to quench it; but by dealing plentifully with the opposite element. The pleasures of sense will not be effectually subdued by foregoing all enjoyment; but by imbibing other pleasures, the relish of which shall deaden the heart to what is opposite. It was thus that the Apostle became *dead to the world by the cross of Christ*. Do not, therefore, reckon thyself restored till thou hast recovered communion with God. David, though the subject of deep contrition, yet was not contented without gaining this important point. Till then the poison would still, at times, be rankling in his imagination. Hence arose the following petitions:—*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right Spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit.* Make these petitions thy own; and if God grant the thing that thine heart desireth, go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee!

EXPOSITORY REMARKS

ON THE

DISCIPLINE

OF THE

PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

When the Apostles, by the preaching of the word, had gathered in any place a sufficient number of individuals to the faith of Christ, it was their uniform practice, for the farther promotion of his kingdom in that place, to form them into a religious society or Christian church. Being thus associated in the name of Christ, divine worship was carried on, Christian ordinances observed, holy discipline maintained, and the word of life, as the light by the golden candlesticks, exhibited. Among them our Lord Jesus Christ, as the high priest of our profession, is represented as walking; observing the good, and applauding it; pointing out the evil, and censuring it; and holding up life and immortality to those who should overcome the temptations of the present state.

Let us suppose him to walk among our several churches, and to address us as he addressed the seven churches of Asia. We trust he would find some things to approve; but we are also apprehensive that he would find many things to censure. Let us then look narrowly into the *discipline* of the primitive churches, and compare ours with it.

By discipline, however, we do not mean to include the whole of the order of a Christian church ; but shall, at this time, confine our attention to that part of church-government which consists in A MUTUAL WATCH OVER ONE ANOTHER, AND THE CONDUCT WE ARE DIRECTED TO PURSUE IN CASES OF DISORDER.

A great part of our duty consists in cultivating what is lovely, but this is not the whole of it ; we must prune as well as plant, if we would bear much fruit, and be Christ's disciples. One of the things applauded in the church of Ephesus was, that *they could not bear those that were evil.*

Yet we are not to suppose, from hence, that no irregularity or imperfection, whatever is an object of forbearance. If uniformity be required in such a degree as that every difference in judgment or practice shall occasion a separation, the churches may be always dividing into parties, which we are persuaded was never encouraged by the apostles of our Lord, and cannot be justified in trivial or ordinary cases. A contrary practice is expressly taught us in the Epistle to the Romans ; (Chap. xiv.) and the cases in which it is to be exercised are there pointed out. An object of forbearance, however, must be one that may exist without being an occasion of dispute and wrangling in the church. It must *not be to doubtful disputations.* (ver. 1.) It must also respect things which do not enter into the essence of God's kingdom, the leading principles of which are *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.* (ver. 16, 17.) That which does not subvert the gospel of the kingdom, nor set aside the authority of the King, though it be an imperfection, is yet to be borne with. Finally : It must be something which does not *destroy the work of God*, or which is not inconsistent with the progress of vital religion in the church, or in our own soul. (ver. 20.) In all such cases we are not to judge one another, but every man's conscience is to be his judge. (ver. 23.)

In attending to those things which are the proper objects of discipline, our first concern should be, to see that all our measures are aimed at *the good of the party, and the honour of God.* Both these ends are pointed out in the case of the Corinthian offender. All was to be done *that his spirit might be saved in the day of the*

Lord, and to clear themselves, as a church, from being partakers of his sin. If these ends be kept in view, they will preserve us from much error; particularly from the two great evils into which churches are in danger of falling—false lenity, and unchristian severity. There is often a party found in a community, who under the name of tenderness, are for neglecting all wholesome discipline; or, if this cannot be accomplished, for delaying it to the uttermost. Such persons are commonly the advocates for disorderly walkers, especially if they be their particular friends or relations. Their language is, 'He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone. My brother hath fallen to day, and I may fall to-morrow.' This spirit, though it exists only in individuals, provided they be persons of any weight or influence, is frequently known to impede the due execution of the laws of Christ; and, if it pervade the community, it will soon reduce it to the lowest state of degeneracy. Such, for a time, was the spirit of the Corinthians; but when brought to a proper sense of things, what *carefulness it wrought in them, yea, what clearing of themselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge.*—In opposing the extreme of false tenderness, others are in danger of falling into unfeeling severity. This spirit will make the worst of every thing, and lead men to convert the censures of the church into weapons of private revenge. Persons of this description know not of what manner of spirit they are. They lose sight of the good of the offender. It is not love that operates in them; for love worketh no evil. The true medium between these extremes is, a union of *mercy and truth.* Genuine mercy is combined with faithfulness, and genuine faithfulness with mercy; and this is the only spirit that is likely to *purge iniquity.** Connivance will produce indifference; and undue severity will arm the offender with prejudice, and so harden him in sin: but the love of God and of our brother's soul, is adapted to answer every good end. If we love God, like Levi, we shall know no man after the flesh, nor acknowledge our nearest kindred; but shall observe his word, and keep his covenant. And if we love the soul of our brother, we shall say,

* Prov. xvi. 6.

'He is fallen to day, and I will reprove him for his good: I may fall to-morrow, and then let him deal the same with me.' Love is the grand secret of church discipline, and will do more than all other things put together towards insuring success.

In the exercise of discipline, it is necessary to distinguish between faults which are the consequence of sudden temptation, and such as are the result of premeditation and habit. The former require a compassionate treatment; the latter a greater portion of severity. The sin of Peter, in denying his Lord was great; and, if noticed by the enemies of Christ, might bring great reproach upon his cause; yet compared with the sin of Solomon it was little. He first gave way to licentiousness, then to idolatry; and, on finding that God, as a punishment for his sin, had given ten tribes to Jeroboam, he sought to kill him. Cases like this are immediately dangerous, and require a prompt and decided treatment, and in which hesitating tenderness would be the height of cruelty. *Of some have compassion, making a difference: others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.**

In all our admonitions, regard should be had to the age and character of the party. An elder, as well as other men, may be in fault, and a fault that may require to be noticed; but let him be told of it in a tender and respectful manner. While you expostulate with younger men on a footing of equality, pay a deference to age and office. *Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren.*

In the due execution of Christian discipline, there are many things to be done by the members of churches *individually*; and it is upon the proper discharge of these duties that much of the peace and purity of a church depends. If we be faithful to one another, there will be but few occasions for public censure. Various improprieties of conduct, neglects of duty, and declensions in the power of godliness, are the proper objects of pastoral admonition. It is one essential branch of this office, to *rebuke, and exhort with all long suffering*. Nor is this work confined to pastors: Christians are directed to *admonish one another*. Indeed, there

* Jude 22, 23. See also Col. vi. 1.

are things which a wise and affectionate people will be concerned to take upon themselves, lest a prejudice should be contracted against the ministry, which may prevent its good effects. This is peculiarly necessary in the settling of differences, in which whole families may be interested, and in which it is extremely difficult to avoid the suspicion of partiality.

In all cases of *personal offence*, the rule laid down by our Lord, in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, ought to be attended to; and no such offence ought to be admitted before a church, till the precept of Christ has been first complied with by the party or parties concerned.

In many cases, where faults are *not* committed immediately against us, and which are unknown except to a few individuals, love will lead us to endeavour to reclaim the party, if possible, without any farther exposure. *A just man will not be willing* unnecessarily to make his brother *a public example.* The scriptures give peculiar encouragement to these, personal and private attempts. *If any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

In cases of *evil report*, where things are said of a brother in our hearing which, if true, must affect his character, and the purity of the church, it cannot be right to go on to report it. Love will not lead to this. Many reports, we know, are unfounded; or, if true in the main, they may have been aggravated; or there may be circumstances attending the case, which, if fully understood, would make things appear very different from the manner in which they have been represented. Now, it is almost impossible that any one but the party himself should be acquainted with all these circumstances, or able to give a full account of them. No time, therefore, should be lost, ere we inquire at the hand of our brother; or if, on any consideration, we feel that to be unsuitable, it would be proper to apply to an officer of the church, who may conduct it with greater propriety.

There are cases of a more public nature still, in which much of the peace and happiness of a church depends upon the conduct of

its members in their individual capacity. The charge given by the Apostle to the Romans, (Chap. xvi. 17, 18.) though applicable to a church, yet seems to be rather addressed to the individuals who compose it: *Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.* The characters to be *avoided*, appear to be persons whose object it is to set up a party in the church, of which they may be the heads or leaders; a kind of religious demagogues. Such men are found, at one time or other, in most societies; and, in some cases, the peace of the churches has been invaded by strangers, who are not of their own community. Let the "brethren" have their eye upon such men. "Mark them:" trace their conduct, and you will soon discover their motives. Stand aloof from them, and "avoid" striking in with their dividing measures. In case of their being members, the church, collectively considered, ought, no doubt, to put away from among them such wicked persons: but, as every collective body is composed of individuals, if those individuals suffer themselves to be drawn away the church is necessarily thrown into confusion, and rendered incapable of a prompt, unanimous, and decided conduct. Let members of churches, therefore, beware how they listen to the insinuations of those who would entice them to join their party. Men of this stamp are described by the Apostle, and therefore may be known, particularly by three things—First, By their doctrine: *It is contrary to that which has been learned of Christ.* Secondly, By their selfish pursuits: *They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies.* Thirdly, By their insinuating, whining pretences of affectionate regard towards their partizans: *By good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple.*

Further: There are duties incumbent on individuals in their behaviour towards persons who *lie under the censure of the church.* If they still continue in a state of impenitence, persist in their sin, or be irreconciled to the church's proceedings with them, it is of the utmost consequence that every member should act a uniform

part towards them. We may, it is true, continue our ordinary and necessary intercourse with them as men, in the concerns of this life : but there must be no familiarity, no social intercourse, no visitings to them, nor receiving visits from them ; nothing, in short, that is expressive of connivance at their conduct. *If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, we must not keep company with such an one, no not to eat.* If individual members act contrary to this rule, and carry it freely towards an offender, as if nothing had taken place, it will render the censure of the church of none effect. Those persons also who behave in this manner, will be considered by the party as his friends, and others who stand aloof, as his enemies, or at least as being unreasonably severe ; and this will work confusion, and render void the best and mos wholesome discipline. We must act in concert, or we may as well do nothing. Members who violate this rule, are partakers of other men's sins, and deserve the rebukes of the church for counteracting its measures.

With respect to those things which fall under the cognizance of a church in its *collective capacity*, we earnestly recommend, in general, that every thing be done, not only with a view to the honour of God, and the good of the party, as before observed, but *with a special regard to the revealed will of Christ.* That some kind of order be preserved in every community, is necessary to its existence. Decency, reputation, and even worldly policy, will induce us to take some notice of gross immoralities : but this is not Christian discipline ; nor will it be productive of its salutary effects. In the choice of officers, few, if any churches would elect a profligate : but if opulence be allowed to supply the place of spirituality, or ambitious or litigious characters be preferred on the principle of expediency, as a means of keeping them in better humour, is it not carnal ? So, in matters of discipline, few churches would suffer a grossly immoral or litigious character to continue among them unnoticed: but, if, instead of a calm, impartial, and decided procedure, we enter into pusillanimous compromises with the offender, consenting that he should withdraw of his own accord; if the crimes of rich men be either entirely overlooked, or but

slightly touched, lest the *cause* should suffer from their being offended ; or if the misconduct of poor men be disregarded on the ground of their being persons of little or no account, *are we not carnal, and walk as men?* Brethren! Are there any such things among us ? Search and consider. Such things ought not to be. The private withdrawment of an individual, if it be without good reasons, may justify a church in admonishing him, and, if he cannot be reclaimed, in excluding him ; but it cannot of itself dissolve the relation. Till such exclusion has taken place, he is a member, and his conduct affects their reputation as much as that of any other member. With regard to a neglect of discipline, lest it should injure the *cause*, what cause must that be which requires to be thus supported ? Be it our concern to obey the laws of Christ, and leave him to support his own cause. If it sink by fulfilling his commandments, let it sink. He will not censure us for not supporting the ark with unhallowed hands. And if it be criminal to fear the rich, it cannot be less so to despise the poor. Let brotherly love abound towards both. Do all things without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

We cannot enumerate all the particular cases which fall under the cognizance of a Christian church, but shall mention a few which are recorded in the scriptures for our imitation.

A DEPARTURE FROM THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL, OR ANY OF ITS LEADING DOCTRINES, is an object of Christian discipline. *I would they were even cut off that trouble you.—I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them that hold the doctrine of Balaam—so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicoliatanes, which things I hate.—A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*

It is worthy of notice, that the only passage in the New Testament wherein heresy is introduced as *an object of discipline*, makes no mention of any thing as composing it but what relates to *the principles* of the party. It may be supposed, that those who were accounted heretics by the apostles, were as impure as their lives as they were antichristian in their doctrine, and that they were commonly disturbers of the peace and unity of the churches : but,

however this might be, neither of these evils are alleged as the reason for which the heretic was to be *rejected.* All that is mentioned is this: *He is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*

He is "subverted;" that is, his professed faith in the gospel is, in effect, overturned, or rendered void; consequently, he requires to be treated as an unbeliever. He is "condemned of himself;" that is, the gospel being a consistent whole, he who rejects some of its leading principles, while he professes to retain others, is certain to fall into self-contradiction: and if this be clearly pointed out in a "first and second admonition," and he still persist, he will be compelled obstinately to shut his eyes against the light, and thus "sin" against the dictates of his own conscience.

It has been asked by persons who disapprove of all church proceedings on account of difference in religious principles, Who is to judge what is heresy? We answer, Those who are to judge what is immorality in dealing with loose characters. To suppose it impossible to judge what heresy is, or to deny that the power of so deciding rests in a Christian church, is to charge the apostolic precept with impertinence. It is true, the judgment of a church may be erroneous, as well as that of an individual; and it becomes them in their decisions to consider that they will all be revised at the great day; but the same may be said of all human judgment, civil or judicial, to which no one is so void of reason as on this account to object.

It has been farther objected, that censuring a person on account of his religious sentiments, invades the right of private judgment, is inconsistent with the liberty of the gospel, and contrary to the leading principles on which Protestants have separated from the Church of Rome, and Protestant Dissenters from the Church of England. The right of private judgment, while we claim no connexion with others, is an undoubted right. We may be Christians, Infidels or Atheists, and none but God has any control over us: but if we desire the friendship and esteem of good men notwithstanding, or claim admission to a Christian church; or should we be in it already, and claim a right to continue our situation, surely they would not be obliged to comply. If so, our right of private

judgment must interfere with that of others, whose judgment tells them that there can be no fellowship between light and darkness, or communion between him that believeth and an infidel. If the liberty of the gospel consists in a right of fellowship with Christian churches whatever be our principles, it will follow, not only that unbelievers may claim visible communion with believers; but that no exclusion for immorality can be justified, provided the party insists that his sentiments are in harmony with his practice. There is a great variety of opinion as to what is morality, as well as to what is truth. One loose character believes in polygamy, another in concubinage, and a third can see no harm in fornication nor even in adultery, provided it be undiscovered.*

If the churches of Rome and England had done nothing more than exclude from their society those characters whom they considered as deviating from the first principles of the gospel, without subjecting them to civil penalties or disabilities, however we might have disputed the truth of their doctrine, we could not justly have objected to their discipline. We should suppose that the separation of Protestants from the one, and of Protestant Dissenters from the other, was for the sake of enjoying a purer church state, wherein they might act up to the laws of Zion's king; and not that they might live as though there were no king in Israel, which is the case where every man does that which is right in his own eyes.

In cases of notorious and complicated wickedness, it appears that, in the primitive churches, immediate exclusion was the consequence. In reference to the incestuous Corinthian, there are no directions given for his being admonished, and excluded only in case of his being incorrigibly impenitent. The apostle determined what should be done: *In the name of the Lord Jesus, when ye are gathered together; to deliver such an one unto Satan.* We cannot but consider it as an error in the discipline of some churches, where persons have been detected of gross and aggravated wickedness, that their exclusion has been suspended and in many cases omitted, on the ground of their professed repentance. While the evil was a secret, it was persisted in; but when exposed by a public detection, then repentance is brought

* Such was the morality taught by Mr. Hume.

forward, as it were in arrest of Judgment. But can that repentance be genuine which is pleaded for the purpose of warding off the censures of a Christian church? We are persuaded it cannot. The eye of a true penitent will be fixed on the greatness of his sin; and he will be the last to discern, or talk of his repentance for it. So far from pleading it in order to evade censure, he will censure himself, and desire nothing more than that testimony may be borne against his conduct for the honour of Christ.

But allowing that repentance, in such cases, is sincere, still it is not of such account as to set aside the necessity of exclusion. The end to be answered by this measure, is not merely the good of the party, but the "clearing" of a Christian church from the very appearance of conniving at immorality; which cannot be accomplished by repentance only. Though Miriam might be truly sorry for her sin in having spoken against Moses, and though she might be healed of her leprosy; yet *the Lord said unto Moses, if her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days; and after that let her be received in again.*

We do not suppose, however, that every notorious fault requires immediate exclusion. The general rule given is, That NOTORIOUS EVILS SHOULD MEET WITH A PUBLIC REBUKE. *Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear.* But this proceeding does not appear to amount to exclusion; it is rather of the nature of a *censure* or *reprimand*, accompanying an admonition. To us it appears that *the circumstances* attending a sin ought to determine whether it require immediate exclusion, or not. If these be highly aggravating; if there appear to have been premeditation, intention, and perseverance in the crime *put away from among yourselves that wicked person*: but if circumstances extenuate, rather than heighten the evil, solemn admonition, accompanied with rebuke, ought to suffice, and no exclusion to follow but in case of incorrigible impenitence.

There are also faults which do not come under the denomination of notorious sins, wherein directions are given for recovering the offenders WITHOUT ANY MENTION BEING MADE OF EXCLUSION, EITHER IMMEDIATE OR ULTIMATE. There is, perhaps, in all the

churches, a description of men whose characters are far from being uniformly circumspect, and yet not sufficiently irregular to warrant their being separated from communion. They are disorderly walkers; busy-bodies in other men's matters, while neglecting their own; in a word, unamiable characters. Now those that are such we are directed to exhort, and charge that they conduct themselves as becometh Christians. If after this they continue disorderly, observe a degree of distance in your conduct towards them; withdraw your intimacy; let them feel the frowns of their brethren: yet be not wholly reserved, but occasionally explain to them the reasons of your conduct, affectionately admonishing them, at the same time, to repentance and amendment of life. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For we hear that there are some who walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command, and exhort, by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. And if any obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed: yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* If churches were to consult only their own reputation, they would often discard such persons at an early period: but where there is reason to hope that the heart is right in the main, great forbearance and long perseverance must be exercised in endeavouring to recover. How many imperfections were discovered in the conduct of the twelve apostles, while their Lord was with them; and what an example of forbearance has he left us! One character reclaimed is of greater account, and more to the honour of a Christian church, than many discarded.

Finally a watchful eye upon the state of the church, and of particular members, with a seasonable interposition, may do more towards the preservation of good order than all other things put together. Discourage whispreings, backbitings and jealousies. Frown on talebearers, and give no ear to their tales. Nip contentions in the bud. Adjust differences in civil matters among yourselves. Bring together, at an early period, those in whom

misconception and distrust have begun to operate, ere ill opinion ripen into settled dislike. By a frank and timely explanation, in the presence of a common friend, that may be healed in an hour, which if permitted to proceed, a series of years cannot eradicate. Be affectionately free with one another. Give tender and faithful hints where it appears to you that one of your brethren is in danger of being drawn aside from the principles or spirit of the gospel. Let all be prepared, from their first entering into connexion with you, to expect them. If any one take offence at such treatment, give him to understand that he who cannot endure caution or a reproof, is unfit for Christian society, and in the utmost danger of falling into mischief.

The free circulation of the blood, and the proper discharge of all the animal functions, are not more necessary to the health of the body, than good discipline is to the prosperity of a community.

If it were duly considered how much the general interests of religion, and even the salvation of men, may be affected by the purity and harmony of Christian churches, we should tremble at the idea of their being interrupted by us. The planting of a church in a neighbourhood, that the gospel may be preached, and the ordinances of Christ administered in their purity, is a great blessing. It is a temple reared for God, in which he designs to record his name, to meet with his humble worshippers, and to bless them. We have seen churches of this description, in the midst of a career of spiritual prosperity, edifying one another in love, and gathering souls to the Reedemer's standard, all, in a little time, blasted and ruined by some unhappy event that has thrown them into disorder. One of the members, it may be, has acted unworthily; he is reproved; his relations or particular acquaintance take on his side; discipline is interrupted: the church is divided into parties; hard things are said on both sides; the bond of love is broken; tender minds are grieved and retire; worship is but thinly attended, and the enjoyment of it is vanished: God's friends mourn in secret, and his enemies triumph, saying, Aha! so would we have it! Truly it is a serious thing to occasion the ruin of church of Christ! *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy!*

A

VINDICATION

OF

PROTESTANT DISSENT,

FROM THE CHARGES OF

THE REV. THOMAS ROBINSON, M. A.

Vicar of St. Mary's, Liecester:

IN A PAMPHLET ENTITLED,

A SERIOUS CALL TO A CONSTANT AND DEVOUT ATTENDANCE ON THE STATED SERVICES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

The oppositions which have of late years been made to Christianity, have happily induced its friends, of all denominations, to come to a better understanding with each other: forbearing contentions of lesser moment, they have joined their efforts in defending the common salvation. On this ground, evangelical Dissenters, though their opinion of a national establishment of religion is the same as before, yet, from a regard to the doctrine, character, and usefulness of many of its ministers, have sincerely rejoiced in their labours. Evangelical Episcopalians have also, many

of them, laid aside smaller differences ; and, whatever they might think of dissent, have esteemed the serious part of Dissenters. Thus far the malignant influence of Infidelity has not only been counteracted but made to defeat itself.

But things have not operated in this way in every instance. In various late publications by evangelical Churchmen, great stress is laid on "regularity," by which seems to be meant, not only a strict regard to the forms and orders of the Establishment, but the standing aloof from all Dissenters, as "sectaries and schismatics." A piece in *The Christian Observer*, said to be written by Mr. R., an aged and respectable clergyman in the north of England, goes so far as to dissuade ministers of his description, from having any acquaintance with them. Such Dissenters as Watts, Doddridge, and Guyse, received "*great advantage*," it seems, from their acquaintance with certain Clergymen ; and employed it in recruiting their congregations at the expense of the Church ! !*

It would seem, from such insinuations as these, to be dangerous for Dissenters, however distinguished by talents or character, to come near these dignified men ; for if in their life-time they be treated with civility, they may expect to be reproached for it after they are dead ! The celebrated work of Mr. Overton, makes quite enough of this "regularity," and bears hard upon Dissenters. "Sectaries and schismatics" are names pretty liberally bestowed upon them. The same may be said of the Address of Mr. Robinson. Whether these gentlemen judge it *prudent* to take such measures, as feeling their churchmanship suspected by their irreligious brethren, and wish to establish it at our expense; or whatever be the reason, they seem of late, some of them at least, to be not a little desirous of renewing hostilities.

Before I proceed any farther, I desire it may be noticed, that I have no personal antipathy to any one of these ministers ; that I have the happiness to be acquainted with several of them, who, I am pursuaded, are men of another spirit ; that even those on whom I take the liberty of animadverting, are esteemed by me, and

* Vol. I. No. III. p. 162.

many other Dissenters, for their work's sake ; that I have no desire to impeach their integrity, in adhering to the Church ; that I utterly dislike all such personal reflections, leaving the judgment of motives to God only ; and, finally, that, whatever objections I may have to particular parts of the Church, they are but little, compared to my aversion from its grand principle ; that is, its being *national*, and *established*, and *directed by civil authority*.

I have no desire to "reproach or calumniate" Mr. R. for what he has written, nor do I blame him for defending the Church as far as he is able, and trying, by fair argument and Christian persuasion, to induce his hearers, who have deserted her communion to return : only let him not complain if others claim the right of examining the justice of what he advances. He speaks of "a host of disputants" appearing, when he, or any of his brethren, defend their own principles. To me it appears, that, for a considerable time, Dissenters have been nearly silent on these subjects ; and that what has been written, has been chiefly on the other side.

Mr. R. declares his "principal concern is with the persons who have left his ministry ; that he desires to stir up no contention with others ; that he casts no reflections on those who, from conscientious motives, separate from the Church ; and will enter into no altercations, nor answer the idle cavils of those who delight in strife." (p. 5.) Yet he stigmatizes Dissenters in general as "sectaries," and charges them with "schism." It may be said, however, that this is only a necessary consequence of his being a Churchman on conviction ; and that, whether he dealt in such language or not, he must, to be consistent, entertain such thoughts of them. Admitting this apology, then, I will conclude Mr. R.'s aversion is not to *persons* but *things*, and, on this ground, will cheerfully join issue with him.

With respect to the persons addressed in Mr. R.'s pamphlet, I do not know that they should complain of him, unless it be for their "conscientiousness" being tacitly called in question. Their minister expostulates with them, and it becomes them to hear him candidly, especially when he professes to address them with "ar-

gument and exhortation, rather than with menace or reproof; assigning what appear to him the strongest reasons for conformity, and leaving them to their mature deliberation, intreating that they may regulate their conduct only so far as they perceive their strength and importance." This is fair and manly.

Mr. R. has done well also, before he exhibits the charge of "schism," to undertake the *proof* of the Church of England being "truly apostolical." *If it be so*, and the justice of its claim on all Christians within the realm to consider themselves as its members can be substantiated, Dissenters must, of course, be "sectaries and schismatics;" and though the state, from political clemency, may tolerate them, yet will they not be acquitted before a higher tribunal. If, on the other hand, it *be not so;* or, though it be, yet if it have no exclusive claim, either from God or man, to the membership of all Christians within the realm, it will follow that the names signify nothing more than they did in the mouths of the ancient enemies of the Christians, who stigmatized them as "the sect of the Nazarenes;" and that the only difference between those who call themselves *the Church*, and other Christians, is, that, being of the sect which happens to be favoured by the state, they are more particularly exposed to the temptation of assuming supercilious airs, and looking down upon their brethren with contempt.

I have said, If the Church of England *be* truly apostolical in the main, yet if it have no *exclusive claim* to the membership of all Christians within the realm, it may not follow that all Dissenters are guilty of "schism," or that they are any more deserving of the name of "sectaries" than Episcopalians are, in countries where theirs is not the established religion. If the Church of England were allowed to be "a part of the church of Christ," (p. 28.) why may not other churches be another part? Is it proveable that any of the primitive churches laid claim to the membership of all Christians within a certain tract of country?

But though, for arguments sake, I have granted this, yet I do not allow it. I am persuaded the Church of England is *not* "a true apostolical church," and have no objection to rest the lawfulness of dissent upon the issue of this question.

Mr.R.'s first argument for it is, "It comforms to apostolical example in the different *orders* of its ministers. (p. 5.) It might have been expected, that, under this head, we should have been referred to *scripture proofs*. If Mr. R. could have told us in what parts of the New Testament we might find the offices of *Arch*-bishops, *Arch*-deacons, *Deans*, *Priests*, &c. &c. &c. there is little doubt but he would; but this he has wisely declined. Or, though the *names* cannot be found, yet if what is done corresponded with what was done in the primitive churches, it might be said that the *spirit* of things is preserved; but the proof of this is not attempted. Or if the work of bishops and deacons in the Church of England, whose names are found in the scriptures, could be proved to be the same as that which pertained to those offices originally, it would be in its favour, so far as it went; but neither is this attempted. Finally, If it had been proved, that one set of pastors were subject to the control of another, who invested them with office, and deprived them of it as occasion required, something had been accomplished; but neither is this attempted. Nor is a single passage of scripture referred to on the subject, except 1 Cor. xiv. 26. 40. LET ALL *things be done to edifying.—Let all things be done decently and in order;* which prove just as much in favour of Popery, as of modern Episcopacy, and have been as often quoted for that purpose, as for this.

What is it then that Mr. R. alleges in proof of his assertion? Hear him. "The subordination established among the Clergy, and the share of power it has assigned to some of them over others, are REASONABLE AND EXPEDIENT, and such as ought not to be objected to, UNLESS THEY CAN BE PROVED TO BE CONTRARY TO DIVINE INJUNCTION." Mr. R. feels himself unable to prove them to be *any part of what God hath enjoined;* but thinks to come off with referring it to his opponents to prove them *forbidden!* Two thirds of the superstitions of Popery and Paganism might thus be vindicated. The baptizing of bells is no more *contrary* to express divine injunction, than the things for which Mr. R. contends.

"IT IS CONGENIAL WITH THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION." One would hope then it would be allowed not to be an essential *part of it;* for that would be making a thing to be congenial with itself.

We admire the British constitution, as a monument of human wisdom in civil affairs, and are thankful to live under its shadow, but we do not think it a model after which Jesus Christ formed the government of his church!

"The distinction of ministers into bishops, priests, and deacons; the general scheme of episcopal ordination, and episcopal government, prevailed VERY EARLY IN THE CHURCH." How much of truth, or of untruth, there may be in this assertion, I shall not inquire: it is sufficient for my argument, that this does not prove it to be "apostolical."

Were the primitive bishops *overseers* of other ministers, or of the flock of God? Were they *chosen* by a dean and chapter, on being nominated by the civil magistrate, or by the suffrage of the people? Did their authority extend over a country, including a number of congregations; or was it confined to one; or, at most, to that and the branches that pertained to it? When bishops became corrupt, did the purer part of the churches appeal to superior authority, to get them removed; or did they only inform the apostles, and the apostles themselves appeal to the churches? These questions must be resolved, before the Church of England can be proved to be apostolical, even with respect to her officers.

If Mr. R. had been chosen to his present office by the suffrage of the congregation, instead of being presented to *the living* by a patron, he would have had an argument to plead with those who have deserted him, which now he has not. As it is, he can only say, "I have solemnly pledged *myself* to attend to your spiritual concerns!" (p. 1.)

Mr. R. opposes the *ordination* of the episcopal Clergy, to that of *self-sent* individuals among the sectaries. (p. 8. 10.) But he must know, this is not a general practice among us; and he might know, that no communion is ordinarily held with such characters. If this practice were half as general among us, as what he wishes to be considered "accidental" in the Church, there might be some appearance of justice in what he alleges.

In short, all Mr. R.'s arguments for the Church of England being "apostolical," have hitherto been such as would equally apply to that of Rome. An advocate for that holy and apostolic church, as

she also calls herself, could allege, that 'she has her bishops, priests, and deacons; that the subordination of the people to the clergy, the clergy to the bishops, and the bishops to the pope, is "REASONABLE AND EXPEDIENT;" that all which is "essential" to the system is, the appointment of one man of "*eminent sanctity and sufficiency*, to have the care of all the churches;" that this, and many other "decent and edifying" things, ought not to be objected to, unless they can be proved to be *contrary to express divine injunction!*' Christian reader! Does any thing belonging to true religion require to be thus supported? Is this any other than *setting up men's threshold by God's thresholds, and their post by his posts?*

It may appear singular to some, that, in proving the Church of England to be apostolical, Mr. R. begins with the "order of her ministers," entirely passing over what the Church is *in itself*. A church, we are told in the articles, is "a congregation of faithful men," &c. Why then did he not undertake to prove that such was the Church of England? that it was a *congregation* assembling together, like that at Corinth, *in one place;* and a congregation of *faithful men*, gathered out of an unbelieving world, and sufficiently distinguished from it? These things Mr. R. has not undertaken to prove, but confines himself to *the order of its ministers*. The *gold* of this temple seems *greater*, in his account, *than the temple itself*. What should we think of a lady, who should pretend to be queen of the realm; but, instead of proving that she was the bride, the king's consort, she alleges the order and subordination of her servants! Would she not be told, that this was a circumstance which might attach to a pretender as well as to the queen, and therefore proved nothing?

To the order of her ministers, Mr. R. adds the purity of her *doctrine*. Here I am willing to allow, that, so far as respects *the written forms* of the Church, it is in the main, evangelical. I allow also, that doctrine is an article of a thousand times greater importance than the orders of ministers, be they what they may. It is on this account that we heartily wish all who believe and preach these doctrines success.

There are two things, however, which require to be noticed under this head:—

First: It is possible to magnify articles of faith, of human composition, to the dishonour of the scriptures; from their agreement with which arises all their value. It is not enough that what we believe is truth, but that we believe it *as a revelation from God.* To be attached to a set of doctrines, be they ever so true, because the Church has taught them, is to put the church in the place of Christ. Our faith, in this case, would stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God; and will be of no account to us, either here or hereafter.

Secondly: The articles of faith drawn up for the church are not *the church*, nor can it be collected from them, as Mr. R. says it can, "what those grand doctrines are in which *the Church* would have all her members instructed and established." (p. 11.) They might, and doubtless did, express what the Church of England that *once was*, would have; but not that which *now is.* It is not true that the Church of England that now is would have any such thing. The Church, if a church it be, is the great body of the bishops, clergy, and people: and they manifestly wish for the reverse of what the Reformers did; and, could they but fairly get rid of the articles, would reckon it a most desirable thing. Yet, by confounding the formularies of the Church, with the Church itself, Mr R. can go on to tell us what she believes, and what she teaches; though, if we except a comparatively small number of her clergy and members, she neither does the one or the other.

To make this matter more plain, let us suppose one of our dissenting churches, which, a century ago, subscribed, as articles of faith, the substance of the Assembly's Catechism; but, within the last fifty years, (though the articles are still retained, and, for the sake of certain emoluments left to the Calvinistic interest in the place, are still subscribed,) the minister and the body of the members are actually become Socinians—would Mr. R. allow of their being a sound and apostolical church, with regard to doctrine, on the mere ground of the retention and subscription of the articles? And should a Calvinistic individual, fondly attached to the old place, stand up in it, with the articles in his hand, and boast in this manner—"Possessed as she is of such a treasure as this of divine truth who shall calumniate or oppose her?" (p. 14) would not Mr. R.

pity his weakness, and feel indignant at the delusion by which he imposed upon himself, and laboured to impose upon others? It is not what a community retains in its books, but what is retained in the minds of its members, that determines what it is. "The body without the spirit is dead."

Thus we have seen the substance of what Mr. R. has to offer in proof of the Church of England's being "apostolical." What follows chiefly consists of commendations of her forms, and objections to those of dissenters. We will, however, proceed to examine the whole.

"The form of *common prayer*," he says, "in which you are called to join, is truly excellent." (p. 14.) There are doubtless many good things in it, but it is too much to pronounce upon it in this manner. To mention only one instance, if the *burial service* were abolished, and what should be said of the deceased were left to the dictates and feelings of Mr. R.'s own mind, I question whether he would utter what is there uttered, however "excellent" he may now profess to think it. But it is not my design to point out the faults of this book. If a liturgy must be used, it may answer the end, upon the whole, as well as another: and if a church must be composed of a whole nation, and consequently, the great body of its clergy, as well as members, be prayerless men, it may be necessary to frame prayers for them; and if to prayers were added sermons, or homilies, it might be still better: but "a congregation of faithful men" needs not such "securities." Mr. R. himself, when he meets with people of this description, and sometimes in public worship, can deal in "extemporaneous effusions," however contemptuously he can allow himself to speak of them in others. It is sufficient also for my argument, that Mr. R does not undertake to prove that the use of a liturgy formed any part of "apostolic" practice.

He proceeds, "We owe it to our country to comply with all its ordinances, which are *not contrary* to a good conscience." By this, Mr. R. must mean all ordinances relative to faith and worship, else it is nothing to his purpose. But on what authority is this position built? Christians were commanded to be subject to *every ordinance of man*, even when under heathen governments,) *for the*

*Lord's sake :** but surely it cannot be imagined, that these ordinances respected the modelling of Christian faith and worship. The Apostle could not mean to give heathen magistrates any such authority, nor to subject Christians to it. The ordinances of man are explained in the context, of things civil and moral, which undoubtedly ought, in all ages and circumstances, to be obeyed by Christians, and that from a religious motive, or *for the Lord's sake* : but to apply it to the regulation of faith and worship, is dishonourable to the only lawgiver of the church. A church itself has no right to *make* ordinances of this kind, but merely to *interpret* and *declare* what they apprehend to be the mind of Christ, and such interpretations and declarations ought ever to be open to revision and correction, when judged to be at variance with his revealed will. To worship God, *by the commandments of men*, is itself forbidden in the scriptures,† and therefore is "contrary to a good conscience." The interposition of human authority, in divine things, generally corrupts them : but if not, yet it affects the nature of conformity to them. To believe a doctrine, or conform to a mode of worship, even though each may in itself be right, *on account of its being ordained of men*, renders it merely human religion, destroying the very principles of Christian obedience.

If the apostles, in planting Christianity, had acted upon Mr. R.'s principle, they would not have ordained the same things "in all churches ;" but have framed a different formulary of worship in different countries. Their first business would have been to examine how much of the old materials of heathen superstition, many parts of which might not be contradicted by express divine injunction, would do to work over again ; and what was the civil constitution of the country, that they might as far as possible, accommodate things to the public mind. I do not wonder that Mr. R. should be partial to this principle : it is that of his church, and of the church of Rome before her. Why is it that Episcopacy has in it so much of Popery, and Popery of heathenism ? The reason in both is the same. They each undertook to convert men *by nations*. Now, to bring a nation over to a new religion, requires that as few alterations be introduced as possible, that *old*

* 1 Peter ii. 13, 14. † Matt. xv. 9. Mark vii. 7.

things be retained under *new names*, and that great sacrifices be made to popular humour. Thus Popery, in numerous instances, was only heathenism in a Christian garb; and Episcopacy was no other than Popery purged of its grosser evils.—But thus did not Paul. Wherever he established Christianity, *old things passed away and all things became new:* or if not, it was the fault of the people, unauthorized by him. He taught Christians to consider themselves as complete in Christ; so as to need neither the additions of heathen philosophy, nor of Jewish ceremony; though each would, doubtless recommend itself on the score of "decency," as not contrary to divine injunction, and as that which would give Christianity a respectable appearance. Col. ii.

Mr. R.'s whole scheme rests upon *supposition*: namely, the *supposed* "eminent sanctity, and sufficiency of bishops," and the *supposed* "solicitousness of civil governments to promote the interests of real Christianity. (pp. viii. 20.) They are both of them no doubt, supposable cases; such as have occurred, and may occur: but woe to the system that rests upon their being generally true! far be it from me to think ill of men in the higher spheres of office, whether civil or ecclesiastical: the former I revere, as ordained of God; and towards the latter I desire to cherish all due benevolence; but to suppose of either, that which is not generally true, is deceiving both ourselves and them. Surely there is a medium between a spirit of "insubordination" to civil government, and inviting our rulers to frame laws and ordinances for the government of Christ's kingdom within their realm, and then flattering them for their pious intentions.

The Episcopalians of this country, have not been wanting in zeal for what has affected *their own interests and privileges.* When James II. published his declaration for liberty of conscience, thinking to introduce Popery, and commanded the clergy to read it in all their churches, the great body of them refused. By this they said in effect, 'It appertaineth not unto thee, O king, to dispossess us of our privileges, and to give them to the ecclesiastics of Rome!' I hope then we may be excused, if we feel equally zealous for the *interest and exclusive authority of Jesus Christ.* If a government be solicitous to promote the interests of real Chris-

tianity, it should not be by making ordinances where Christ has not made them; but by protecting men in the exercise of a good conscience, and encouraging them to obey the ordinances already made in the holy scriptures.

Mr. R. holds up the piety of the Reformers: and we could hold up the piety of thousands who have refused conforming to their rules, as not answering to the model of the New Testament; and who were persecuted in almost every form on this account, and that by men who should have been "eminent for sanctity and sufficiency."

Mr. R. has hitherto argued chiefly in a way of defence: but, emboldened by his success, he now commences an attack. "Many strong objections," he says, "may be urged against a different ecclesiastical constitution." (p. 25.) Let us hear them. "If you be solicited to depart from us, it will become you previously to consider whither you should go." Very good. "Would any solid advantage be gained by the desertion of our ordinances, by the demolition of our establishment, and by the appointment of another system? Ah! what incalculable evils would ensue!—How injurious to society and religion!" Mr. R. by "another system," must mean that of infidelity; and does he call this a "different ecclesiastical constitution?" I hope the persons whom he wishes to retain in communion, are not inclined to this. "Insubordination and excessive profligacy," are consequences of leaving *Christian worship*, and not merely that of the *Episcopal church*.

But allowing the best that they thought of being *Dissenters*, "What is that plan of worship," he asks, "what the government and principles of that religious society you are invited to join?"—Very good;—what are they?

"They (Dissenters, I suppose he means) differ from each other as much as they do from the Church." (p. 26.) If by "the Church" were meant her doctrinal articles, he might have added, *and much more*.—But those things should not be alleged against Dissenters which are common to all parties. It is marvellous that Churchmen should pretend to be of one mind, and that at a time when the most ardent contentions divide them; one party maintaining that the articles mean this, another that, and a third that

they have no meaning, but are merely articles of peace.* Have we Arminians?—So have they:—Arians?—So have they:—Socinians: So have they:—Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of their ownselves?—So have they. The only difference is, our churches being *independent* of each other, we have no general bond of connexion, so as to compel us to hold communion with such people: but *they have.* We can, if so disposed, stand aloof from all these evils, and so escape the charge of being partakers of other men's sins: but *they cannot;* for the church is one, and indivisible, including all descriptions of men who choose to frequent her assemblies. Her barriers, which protect the sacred symbols of our Saviour's death, themselves, against interested infidelity and profligacy, are well known to be very feeble, and such as must in various instances, give way to worldly expediency. If, indeed, a particular parish church, wherein a godly clergyman officiates, were secluded from the rest of the nation, and he were not accountable for any thing which is done beyond the limits of his own immediate charge, the evil might be considerably lessened: but it is not so. *He that sweareth by* this *altar, sweareth by it, and all things thereon;* actually holding fellowship with all the avowed Arminians, and disguised Arians, Socinians, and Infidels, who in different parts of the land are admitted without scruple to communion.

It is further objected, that we "almost all agree in giving the supreme direction and control to the people." It seems, then, we are *agreed* in something; in an article too, in which, as ministers, we cannot well be accused of "*lording* it over God's heritage." Whether the power of admitting members be as safe in the hands of the people, in conjunction with their pastor, as in those of the pastor alone, or not; surely, that of excluding offenders by a solemn act of the whole body, is as consistent with apostolical order, as prosecuting them for their sins in a spiritual court!†

"They abolish all subscriptions to articles of faith." It is true we do not require our ministers to swear to them; looking upon

* See Overton's *True Churchman.* † See 1. Cor. v. 4, 5. 2 Cor. ii. 6.

the word of a Christian man to be as his oath. But it is not true of perhaps the major part of Dissenters that they subscribe no articles.

Our public *catechisms*, which are used in instructing our children, and which, were they but established by *civil authority* would be accounted to contain as great a treasure as the church articles, are much more believed and regarded among us than the latter among them. But besides these, many of our churches express their leading principles in writing, to which not merely the minister, as in the Established Church, but every member subscribes his name. And where this is not done, many of them are so attached to the scriptures, and so well acquainted with one another, that no *practical* inconvenience arises from it. It is a fact that ought for ever to silence our accusers, that the ministers and members of the church of England, with all their boasted security against error in virtue of their articles, are become so degenerate, that scarcely one in ten believes them: whereas Dissenters, with all their want of security, do, two out of three at least, believe the doctrines contained in them! The church has more believers of her doctrines among Dissenters than among her own members; and that, notwithstanding the proportion of the former to the latter is probably less than as one to seven!

Yet "a society of Christians thus constituted, without *establishing* any test of orthodoxy, or forms of public devotion, though at their first union they may be sound in the faith, upright in their views, and exemplary in their conduct, is likely to degenerate." *The word of Christ dwelling richly in them*, then, is no competent security, unless it be reduced to proper forms, and established by authority! It is true, that, "from the corrupt tendency of the human mind," we are always in danger of degenerating; but that Mr. R. should confine it to Dissenters, and talk of its being "confined by indubitable facts," is passing strange. The Church of England, owing to her excellent means of preservation, is in no danger, it seems of degeneracy! The descendants of the first Reformers have *not* departed from their purity, either in faith or practice! The subscription of the articles by the clergy, (though scarcely one in ten believes them,) has preserved not only them-

selves, but the people, who do not subscribe them, from error! And buildings—I should have said "temples"—which have once been appropriated to the promotion of evangelical religion, are never known among them to be applied to opposite purposes!

"They leave the minister at large to offer up prayer and praise, according to the dictates and feelings of his own mind." Just so; and thus for any thing that appears in the New Testament to the contrary, were the primitive ministers left. Where men are destitute of a praying spirit, it may not be safe to leave them "at large:" perhaps the more closely they are confined, the better; but they that fear God have no need of being so treated. Thos forms which Mr. R. so highly extols, were originally the dictates and feelings of fallible individuals: and if it be, as he suggests, that "much evil results from such a mode," why does he himself practise it? Are the dictates and feelings of his mind, being *a man under authority*, different from those of other ministers?

But the course of things among us tends to encourage "pride and contention." That these evils are too prevalent in our churches we shall not deny: they were so in the primitive churches, which also had their Diotrepheses as well as we. And is there no danger of clerical pride, and of many an official Diotrephes in the Church? It deserves to be considered, whether the *peace* of which the Church has to boast among her members, instead of being the fruit of meekness and brotherly love, be not rather the ease of indifference, and the stillness of ecclesiastical despotism. Where one man is all, the rest are nothing at all.

What is urged under Mr. R.'s last head, is built entirely upon the validity of what was advanced before it. If the Church of England be *not* truly apostolical; if her doctrines be neither believed nor taught by the great body of her clergy; if her forms be not binding on men's consciences, and ought not to be made so; if the ordinances of men, to which we are obliged to be subject, be confined to things of a civil and moral nature; the charge of "schism" falls to the ground.

I doubt not but that there are many of the people of God in the Church of England; and perhaps Mr. R. will admit there may be some in the Church of Rome; and that it is their duty to *come out of*

her, that they partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues. It is far from my desire to attack the National Church, or to interfere with its concerns, any farther than is necessary to vindicate the practice of Dissent from the reproaches heaped upon it by such writers as Mr. Robinson. I will not, like some Nonconformists, complain of her hard terms of admission; for if they were easier, or even abolished, I have no idea, at present, that I should covet to enter in. I regret not the loss of any advantages which I might there possess. Whatever be the articles and forms, or even the belief of a community, yet if it put itself under the control of the civil power in religious matters, for the sake of outward advantages and acquiesce in the disposal of those advantages by interested patronage, *this itself* is a sufficient ground for separation. For where things are thus conducted, "the souls of men" are become an article of merchandize; and the church is little other than an instrument of power and aggrandizement in the hands of worldly men. This would have been an insuperable objection to me, had I lived, and possessed my present views, in the purest times of the Reformation. Such a constitution must of necessity confound the church and the world. All the difference between those times and these is, they sowed the seeds, and we have seen the harvest. We see in the great body of the members, of this community, not *saints, and faithful in Christ Jesus*, such as were the members of the primitive churches: but men of the world; men who would be ashamed to be thought "saints," and who scruple not to deride all spiritual religion. A community of this description is not a "congregation of faithful men;" and so, by the confession of the Church itself, is not a church of Christ.

Whatever may be said of "schisms," or divisions among Christians, they are things very different from *separations from the world.* From the latter we are commanded to WITHDRAW *ourselves:* not "altogether" indeed, from men who make no pretence to religion; for then we must needs go out of the world: but from those who are *called brethren*, or profess to know God, but in works deny him. From such it is our duty to stand aloof, even in our ordinary intercourse; and much more in solemn communion at the table of the Lord.*

* 1 Cor. v. 9—13

In separating from the Church of England we conform to the divine precept, *Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness; and what communion hath light with darkness?—Wherefore come out from among them,* AND BE YE SEPARATE, SAITH THE LORD; *and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* Not that we consider the whole body as unbelievers: but if the greater part be such, and the principles on which they hold communion make no provision for excluding them, it amounts to the same thing in effect, as if they were all such. If a part of the people of God themselves resolve to hold communion with unbelievers, we ought to *withdraw* from them, lest we be partakers of other men's sins. In so doing, we do not divide from them *as Christians*, but as *brethren who walk disorderly*, refusing to follow them off their proper ground, or to assist them in breaking down the fences of the church, and so confounding it with the world.

If it be objected, that 'the practice forbidden to the Corinthians was not their admitting unbelievers to commune with them in Christian ordinances, but their going to commune with unbelievers at heathen ordinances,' this is granted: but the latter practice is forbidden on *principles* which equally forbid the former. The *impossibility* of Christian communion subsisting between them, and their being called to be *separate*, are each as applicable to the one as to the other.

If it be farther objected, that "where men *profess* Christianity, we have no right to sit in judgment upon their hearts; but ought charitably to consider and treat them as *believers*,'—I answer: If the thing professed were genuine personal Christianity, and there were nothing in the spirit and conduct of the party that rendered his profession incredible, this objection were valid; but where no pretence is made to any other than traditional assent, which in Turkey would have made them Mahometans, and in China, Pagans; where faith is manifestly *dead*, being alone, or what is worse, accompanied by the works of the flesh; where the very idea of being *born of God* is derided, and all spiritual religion regarded with con-

tempt ; to consider such persons as believers is an abuse of charity, and to treat them as such is to foster them in self-deception.

The *principles*, moreover, on which the Corinthians were forbidden to commune with unbelievers in theory, equally forbid our communing with unbelievers in practice. There can be no Christian communion in the one case, any more than in the other. "Light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness," are as impossible to be united here as there ; and a *separation* from the world is as impracticable in the latter case as in the former. The *reason* also given for the divine precept applies in both instances. The Apostle intimates, that associations with the world, in religious matters, *straiten* believers, whom he wishes to be *enlarged*. Thus a lively animal is straitened in his efforts, by being unequally yoked with one that is tardy : and thus Christians are restrained from holy freedom, and the proper exertion of themselves in the cause of Christ, by their connexion with worldly men, who will always be throwing difficulties in the way of those pursuits in which they have no delight.

Finally : Notwithstanding what is constantly alleged of the *usefulness* of good men by continuing in the National Church, (and if there they must be, I wish them to be an hundred times more useful than they are,) I am persuaded it will be found that it is hereby not a little impeded. If the people of God, while they proved themselves to be the cordial friends of civil government and good order in society, could be scripturally *separated* from the world, and act together like a band of men whose hearts God had touched, their usefulness would far surpass any thing that we have hitherto seen.

Infidels would not then have to reproach Christianity with being an engine of state, nor to object that the principal supporters of it were too deeply interested in its temporal advantages for their testimony to be regarded as impartial. This is the reason why the writings of a WILBERFORCE, and others who are called laymen, make so deep an impression upon the public mind, in comparison of those of dignified Clergymen. Many among the evangelical clergy, I acknowledge, have proved themselves to be very disinterested. They are far from making so much of their time and talents as they might do in other pursuits. But the Church of which

they boast, is as much a place of merchandize as the Royal Exchange. The disinterested testimony of a few people, who are united together, not by a sectarian, but a truly catholic spirit, and whose life comports with their doctrine, speaks a thousand times louder in the consciences of men, than the decrees of a council, enforced by all the authority, ecclesiastical or civil, which the greatest nation, or all the nations of the earth, can muster up. The army of the Lamb, by which he will overcome his enemies, is not described as connected with the states of the respective kingdoms of the earth; but as a select band, acting immediately under his authority. *He is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.*

REMARKS

ON

TWO SERMONS,

BY MR. W. W. HORNE, OF YARMOUTH,

ENTITLED,

"*THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL VINDICATED.*"

My dear Friend,

You have sent me Two Sermons, by *William Wales Horne*, entitled, *The Faith of the Gospel Vindicated;* requesting my opinion of them. Why did you wish to impose upon me the task of reading such a performance? I suppose it was owing to your being a Norfolk man, and feeling interested in any thing that is done among the churches in that part of the kingdom. I hope this is not a fair sample of Norfolk divinity. If it be, they are low indeed! It would appear, however, that the author is a man of some consequence, at least in his own eyes as, by the motto he has chosen, he seems to consider himself as *set for the defence of the gospel.*

Defence implies attack. Has any body in Norfolk, then, been attacking what he calls the gospel? So it should seem; and I should almost suspect, from some passages, that the assailants were in his own congregation. He certainly appears to be out of humour with some of them. (p. 32.) Indeed I entertain a hope, for

their sakes, that this may be the case ; for it is grievous to think that a people sustaining the character of a Christian church should suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such flimsy, incoherent, and erroneous preaching, and reckon it the gospel of Jesus Christ !

Of Mr. Horne I know nothing, save from this publication. He seems disposed, however, to give his readers all the information he can respecting *himself*, and this even in his titlepage. From thence we learn, First, That he is not only a preacher, (which we might have gathered from his publishing " Sermons," (but a " minister of the gospel." Secondly, That he is not an ordinary minister, but one who is peculiarly qualified to repel the attacks of adversaries ; " set," like an apostle, " for the defence of the gospel." Thirdly, That he not only preaches and defends the gospel, but does all " extempore ;" that is, without writing, or studying his discourses, before he delivers them. Fourthly, That though he neither writes nor thinks himself, in order to preaching ; yet such is the importance of what he delivers, that " James Murden," a short-hand writer, sits and takes down his discourses ; by which means they are preserved for the benefit of posterity. Finally, On the back of the same leaf, we are given to understand, that if the public will come forward, and, by a liberal subscription, secure him in a pecuniary view, he will give them a whole volume of these sermons, containing 300 pages, all on the most " interesting and edifying subjects." Whether all this information was *necessary*, especially that which relates to the sermons being " delivered extempore," some persons may doubt: thus much however may be acknowledged, that if from this time we remain ignorant of Mr. Horne's extraordinary talents, and be either uninterested or unedified by his writings, it must be our own fault.

After a great deal said about faith, in which the belief of the truth is frequently confounded with the truth believed ; and much declamation against error, in which we are, after all, left to guess wherein it consists, the preacher at length comes to the point which he appears to have had in view ; or, (as he does not *think* beforehand,) to the point which was impressed upon his

mind at the time ; that is to say, that *faith is not the duty of either sinners or saints.*

Mr. Horne asserts, that " men in nature's darkness have nothing to do with the faith of God's elect." He does not mean by this, that they are destitute of it ; for that would be saying no more than his opponents would admit: but that they have no *right* to believe in Jesus Christ. This he attempts to prove, from their being under a covenant of works. " The law," he says, " is their first husband ; and till they become dead to him, they cannot be married to another, (that is, to Christ by faith,) without being called *adulteresses.*" (p. 26.) If this reasoning were allowed to be solid, it would only affect those who are in "nature's darkness ;" whereas Mr. Horne's position is, That faith is not the duty of any man, of believers any more than of unbelievers. " It is not," he says, " a duty which God requires of his people ; but a grace which he gives them." (p. 26.) But the reasoning itself is false. That sinners are alive to the law, as a covenant of works, is too true: but that the law, in that character, is alive to them, is not true.

The covenant of which the Apostle speaks, in the passage alluded to, is that which was made with Israel at Sinai, to which they, as a nation, were bound by divine authority, till the coming of Christ ; but which being then abolished, they were no longer under obligation to adhere to it as a covenant, but were at liberty to embrace a new and better dispensation. This was applicable to the Jews, to whom the Apostle addresses himself, as them *who knew the law ;* but is totally inapplicable to Gentiles, who never were married to the law. But whether the covenant of works be considered as made with Israel at Sinai, or with man in innocence, it is no longer in force ; that is to say, it is dead. In the first view, it was rendered null by the introduction of the gospel : *For in that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old, is ready to vanish away.* In the last view, it must have ceased from the time of man's apostacy. The law has no promise of life to a single transgressor, and never had ; but merely a threatening of death. God is not, therefore, in covenant with sinners ; nor they with him ; they are not under a covenant of works ; but merely under the curse for trans-

gressing it. Thus, taking the covenant which way we will, it is dead; and therefore, on Mr. Horne's own principle, sinners ought to be dead to it; and, in virtue of the free invitations of the gospel, are at liberty to be married to another.

A *desire to be under the law* is not now an attachment to a divine constitution; nor is there any regard to God's law in it: it is merely a proud and unbelieving reluctance to admit that we have broken the law, and a vain desire to be still claiming life as the reward of our own good deeds. In short it is no other than an attachment to the idol of our own righteousness; and we might as well infer, that while a sinner is *joined to idols*, he has no *right* to desert them and return to God, as that he would be guilty of spiritual adultery by coming off from all dependance on self, and believing in Jesus Christ. If this doctrine were true, our Saviour, instead of complaining of the unbelieving Jews, that they *would not come to him that they might have life*, ought to have commended them for their fidelity to their "first husband." Nay, if this doctrine be true, I see not why Mr. Horne should exclaim, as he does, against people being of a pharisaical or self-righteous spirit: they ought rather to be commended for their chaste adherence to the law, as to their own proper husband.

Mr. Horne tells us of some who *strive to enter in at the strait gate, and are not able*; and that the reason why they are not able, is, that they "do not strive *lawfully*, or consistently with the mind and will of God, not coming to God in his own lawful and appointed way. "The Jews of old," he says, "strove to enter in, but were not able; because they strove, like our modern pharisees, to enter in by the works of the law. Rom. ix. 32, 33." (p. 7.) Very good: but how can these things hang together? If coming to God by Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the law, accord with the "mind and will of God," and be God's "lawful and appointed way;" how can it be *unlawful* to walk in it? On the other hand, If the law, as a covenant, be the proper husband of the unconverted, and they ought faithfully to adhere to him, and not to come to God by Jesus Christ, on pain of being called "adulteresses," why complain of them for striving *unlawfully;* and tax them with losing a prize by this their unlawful conduct; with which, after

all, they had "nothing to do." "Self-righteous thoughts and imaginations," says he, "are as inimical to the attributes of the Deity, and as offensive to the Lord of glory, as the immorality of the profligate part of mankind." And yet they have no *right* to relinquish them by believing in Jesus Christ! "A self-righteous sinner," he adds, is in open rebellion against the Lord, and against his anointed Son." And yet he has no *right* to be reconciled to him, or to come to him that he might have life! "The spirit of the self-righteous is directly opposite to that humility, self-abhorrence, and self-abasement requisite in poor, undone, rebellious sinners, when coming before a God of immaculate purity." (p. 42.) And yet, strange to tell, they *ought* to be of this spirit, and not of that which renounces these self-exalting notions and depends entirely on Jesus Christ, lest they be called "*adulteresses!*" In most cases, gross inconsistencies are reckoned blemishes: whether they will be so in this, I cannot determine. As the preacher does not profess to think before he speaks, contradiction may, for aught I know, be here in character.

"Whatever may be thought of universal exhortations, I am bold to assert," says Mr. Horne, "that not one of the self-righteous are invited to come to Christ—*Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (p. 26.) Of Mr. Horne's "boldness," there is certainly no doubt: but *wherein he is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.* The self-righteous Jews were invited to the gospel-supper before the Gentiles. And though they *made light of it*, yet the kingdom of God at that time *came nigh* unto them. The same characters were exhorted, *while they had the light, to believe in the light, that they might be the children of light.* Now, whether we should hearken to God's word, or to the "bold" assertions of Mr. Horne, let Christians judge.—'But Christ *came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*' True; and he came into the world to *save not the righteous*, but *sinners:* yet Paul and many other self-righteous characters were saved by him; not, however, *in* their self-righteousness, but *from* it: and thus it is that self-righteous characters are *called* to relinquish their vain hopes, and to come to Jesus as *sinners* for salvation.

"Faith," says Mr. Horne, "is not a natural grace: it is no du-

ty of the law." Having no idea what a "natural grace" is, unless it were some ornament to the body, or mind, I can make no answer to the former part of this assertion. As to the latter, it is true, that obedience to the law and faith in Christ, *as mediums of obtaining life*, are, in the scriptures, opposed to each other. The one receives justification as a reward; the other as a free gift to the unworthy, wholly out of respect to the righteousness of another.

It is on the *medium of obtaining life*, that the Apostle speaks, when he says, the law is not of faith. *The just*, says he *shall* LIVE *by faith. And the law is not of faith: but the man that doeth them, shall live in them.* Justification by obedience to the law was entirely distinct, therefore, from justification by faith in Christ: the one would be by works; the other is by grace.

It does not follow, however, that the law, *considered as a standard of right and wrong*, is opposed to faith, or that it does not require it. It is manifest that faith is a part of the *revealed will* of God, being commanded in the scriptures. *Repent, and believe the gospel.—While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.—This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* If these commandments have not their root in the moral law, which requires every creature to love God under every manifestation by which he shall at any time make himself known, they must be the requirements of the gospel, under the form of a *new law*; a principle which has been generally rejected by the friends of evangelical truth.

"Had faith," says Mr. Horne, "been a duty of the law, the Jews of old would have obtained that which they sought after; (the peculiar favour of God;) for they sought it by the works of the law. But faith was not of the law, and therefore they could not obtain it." (p. 27.) By this reasoning, it would seem as if the carnal Jews really complied with the divine law; going to the utmost of its requirements, and this without finding faith in Christ among them, because it was not there to be found. But has Mr. Horne yet to learn, that in all the attachment of the carnal Jews to the works of the law, there was no real conformity to any divine precept? *For the carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

Mr. Horne considers faith as the "gift, or work of God's Holy Spirit:" and therefore concludes that it cannot be a duty. I have no dispute with him as to faith, and every thing else which is truly good in a fallen creature, being of grace: but it does not follow from thence that it is not a duty; for there is no good performed in the world but that which grace produces. If, therefore, nothing be the duty of sinners but that which may be done without the grace of God, it is not their duty to do any thing good: and if so, all their alienation of heart from God and goodness, is not their sin; nor does it require forgiveness.—"Is it the duty of the unconverted man," asks Mr. Horne, "to make himself a new creature in Christ; to give himself the Holy Ghost?" No; but it is his duty to be that which nothing short of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit can make him.

Finally: "If evangelical faith be a duty, the believer may glory, and boast himself against the unbeliever." (p. 31.) If it were a duty with which he complied *of his own accord, making himself to differ*, he might; but not else. I suppose Mr. Horne reckons himself a believer, and to have done some good in the world, by preaching and "defending the gospel;" and does he glory on this account? He may; but he cannot have *so learned Christ, if so be he have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.*

If I could have access to the churches in Norfolk, who are connected with Mr. Horne, I would affectionately and earnestly intreat their attention to the subject. Not that I wish them to embroil themselves and one another in furious contentions. Far from it! I should be very sorry to hear of any minister whom I considered as embracing the truth, following Mr. Horne's example. It is not by converting the pulpit into a stage of strife, nor by availing ourselves of the silence which decency imposes upon an audience, to pour forth personal invective, that truth is promoted. Such conduct may pass with some people for faithfulness; but in reality it is as mean as it is injurious. It is by reading, by calm and serious reflection, by humble prayer, and by a free and friendly communication of our thoughts to one another in private conversation, that truth makes progress.

I do not wish the churches in Norfolk, or any where else, to be engaged in unprofitable disputes; but if I could have access to them, I would address them in some such manner as the following:—

Be not led away, my brethren, by vain men. Judge for yourselves. If you choose to examine the subject to which Mr. Horne refers you, read, and read impartially, what has been written upon it.* Or, if things of a controversial nature be disagreeable to you, read the lives of an *Edwards*, a *Brainerd*, and a *Pearce;* and *know not the speeches of them that are puffed up, but the power.* Above all, read your Bible, and carefully notice whether these things be so. Inquire whether the scriptures do not exhort, admonish, and persuade sinners to those very things which, where they exist, are ascribed to the grace of God. Do not take it for granted that you are *sound in the faith* because such preachers as Mr. Horne exhort you to hold fast your present sentiments. That faith is sound, and that only, which accords with the scriptures, and finds a use for every part of them. The scriptures are not written systematically; yet they contain materials for a system. They resemble the stones which were wrought for the building of the temple, previously to their being laid in it: each was prepared for its proper place, and adapted to form a part of a beautiful whole. Some of these materials might have been worked up in any one of those *high places* which were a snare to Israel, or even in a *temple for Moloch:* but no other building than that which was erected according to the divine pattern delivered to Solomon, would have found a use for all. That fabric in which every material finds its place is the true temple of God.

Many writers and preachers have formed their favourite schemes, or adopted them from others, and been very eager in defending them; but, in so doing, a great part of the Bible has been thrown aside as useless, and has rarely been mentioned but for the purpose of explaining it away. Arminianism can find but little use for the

* Particularly Booth's Glad Tidings to Perishing Sinners; Scott on the Nature and Warrant of Faith: and a work entitled The Gospel Worthy of all Acceptation.

doctrinal part of Paul's Epistles, in which free, discriminating, and effectual grace, is clearly taught; and false Calvinism looks with an evil eye on the exhortations, warnings, and invitations to the unconverted, in the four evangelists, and the Acts of the Apostles. Is not this a plain proof that neither of these systems is evangelical? That, I say again, is the true gospel, which gives to every part of scripture its fair and full meaning; and if the views we have hitherto entertained will not do this, we ought to conclude that whatever we may have learned, we have yet to learn *the truth as it is in* JESUS.

Judge impartially, my brethren, whether the doctrine taught by Mr. Horne, and others, will admit of such exhortations to the unconverted, as occur in the preaching of John the Baptist, Christ, and his Apostles. If the language in which they address their carnal hearers were uttered in your pulpits, and nothing added by the preacher to explain away its force, would you not begin to suspect him of error? Yet your so doing ought in reality to make you suspect yourselves; and to fear lest, while you think you are doing God service, you should be found fighting against him.

In calling the doctrine defended by Mr. Horne, *false Calvinism*, I have not miscalled it. In proof of this, I appeal to the writings of that great reformer, and of the ablest defenders of his system in later times, of all indeed who have been called Calvinists, till within an hundred years. Were you to read many of Calvin's Sermons, without knowing who was the author, you would be led, from the ideas you appear at present to entertain, to pronounce him an Arminian; neither would Goodwin, nor Owen, nor Charnock, nor Flavel, nor Bunyan, escape the charge. These men believed and preached the doctrines of grace; but not in such a way as to exclude exhortations to the unconverted, to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. The doctrine which *you* call Calvinism, (but which, in reality, is Antinomianism,) is as opposite to that of the Reformers, Puritans, and Nonconformists, as it is to that of the apostles.

We do not ask you to relinquish the doctrine of salvation by grace alone: so far from it, were you to do so, we would, on that

account have no fellowship with you. We have no doubt of justification being wholly on account of the righteousness of Jesus; nor of faith, wherever it exists, being the free gift of God. On such subjects we could say with Job, *We have understanding as well as you; we are not inferior to you; yea, who knoweth not such things as these?* But we ask you to admit other principles, equally true, and equally important as they are; principles taught by the same inspired writers, and which, therefore, must be consistent with them.

Doctrinal sentiments will have a great influence on the whole of our religion. They will operate powerfully in the forming of our spirit, and the regulation of our conduct. Many people have complained of the unchristian spirit discovered by Mr. Huntington, and his followers. 'We have not so much objection, (say they,) to his doctrine; but such an awful degree of spiritual pride and rancour runs through all he writes—.' For my part, I never make such complaint: I should as soon complain of thistles and thorns for their bearing prickles. Mr. Huntington's spirit comports with his doctrine: and if we receive one, we must receive both.

False doctrine will *eat as doth a canker:* in individuals it will produce self-importance, self-will, and almost every other selfish disposition; and if admitted into churches, it will be followed by a neglect of faithful discipline, and holy practice. Such have been the effects of that doctrine for which Mr. Horne contends, in many of the churches in the midland parts of the kingdom; and such, it is to be feared, have been its effects in some of yours.

Though the apostles of our Lord renounced all dependence upon the works of the law for justification; yet they did not *make void the law, but established it*; accounting it *holy, just, and good;* and *delighted in it after the inner man:* but many preachers, who are eager in defending these principles, do not scruple to disown it entirely, as *a rule of life;* and though Mr. Horne has not done this, yet he continally confounds what the scriptures distinguish, applying that which is spoken of the law *as a covenant* or *term of justification* to that which respects it *as the eternal standard of right and wrong*. But those who scarcely ever mention the law

of God without disrespect, are not far from disowning it as a rule of life, and those who disown it as a rule of life can hardly be expected to walk by it. Far be it from me to deal in indiscriminate censure. That good men have favoured these principles, I have no doubt: and where the heart is upright, an erroneous sentiment, though it be very injurious, will not be the great governing principle of life. It is also allowed, that bad men will be found under every form of religious profession. But, so far as my observation extends, there is a much larger proportion of such characters among ministers of this description, than any others who are accounted evangelical. Many of them are not only known to be loose in their general deportment, but seem to have laid aside all honour and conscience toward the churches. Some, not having any stated employment, (as well as they may not,) wander up and down the country, as if for a piece of bread, sowing the seeds of dissention, and raising a party for themselves, in every place where they come. Others, when invited to preach to a church on probation, after having divided and scattered it by their violence, have been necessitated to leave it; and finding no other people who would employ them, have frequently been known to retire with a party of their adherents, and to set up an opposite interest in the same place, to the great injury and reproach of religion. Yet these men, if they might be believed, are each *set for the defence of the gospel.*

From the pen of an apostle and prisoner of Jesus Christ, such language was proper; but the *words of the wise* are not *fitted in the lips* of every one. Whether these men wish to imitate Mr. Huntington, who takes for his motto the words of Job, *The root of the matter is found in me;* or whether it be natural to them to proclaim to the world the high opinion they entertain of themselves, I cannot determine: but this is certain, that if they and he had each studied to imitate a certain impostor, who *bewitched the people, giving out that* HIMSELF WAS SOME GREAT ONE, they could scarcely have acted in stricter conformity to his example.

I have little or no acquaintance with your ministers; but I know something of those in other parts of the country, who embrace the doctrine taught by Mr. Horne; and have reason to be-

lieve that their preaching is mostly composed of ludicrous rant, and idle declamation. The principal objects against which they declaim, are pharisaism and the devil; and the method taken to persuade their hearers that they are the greatest enemies to both, is *telling them that they are so!* As to the former, if it consist in *trusting that we are righteous, and despising others*, perhaps there are few religious professors who can prefer a better claim to it than themselves. And as to their boasting and brandishing against the latter, what serious mind, nay, what mind possessed of common understanding, can endure it? it may furnish the ignorant and light-minded with a laugh: but every man of sense must be disgusted by it. To hear the low and vulgar jokes, which they are continually uttering against the grand adversary of God and man, both in the pulpit and out of it, one might be tempted to conclude that instead of being his enemies, they were on terms of more than ordinary intimacy with him. Mr. Merryman may have high words with his master, for the amusement of the audience; but he will not hurt him: they understand one another. Sure I am, Satan has no objection to be thus treated.

So they have preached, and so too many *have believed.* Brethren, *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good! And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

THE

MORAL LAW

THE

RULE OF CONDUCT TO BELIEVERS.

My dear Brother,

You requested me to give you my reasons, in the brief compass of a letter, for considering *the Moral Law as the rule of Conduct to Believers.* It is painful that a question of this nature should ever have been started among professing Christians ; but this, and other things of the kind, are permitted that they who are approved may be made manifest.

You do not wish me my dear brother, to encounter the foul dogmas of our pulpit-libertines ; but to state a few plain, scriptural evidences, which may be useful to some serious minds. who have been entangled in the maizes of their delusions.—Before I proceed to this, however it will be proper to make a remark or two in a general way.

First: There is no dispute on the ground of our acceptance with God. We are not justified on account of any thing inherent, whether before, in, or after believing ; but merely for the sake of the righteousness of Christ, believed in and imputed to us. As a medium of life, or, (as our divines commonly express it,) as a covenant, believers are dead to the law, and the law to them, being united to another husband.

Secondly : The question is not, Whether the whole of Christian obedience be *formally* required in the Ten Commandments ?

Certainly it is not. Neither the ordinance of baptism, nor that of the supper, are expressly required by them; and there may be other duties which they do not, in so many words inculcate;—but the question is, Whether it be not *virtually* required by them? and, Whether they be not *binding* on believers? If we allow our Saviour to be a just expositor, the sum of the Ten Commandments is, *The love of God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, and of our neighbour as ourselves;* and this includes all the obedience that can possibly be yielded by a creature. If we love God with all our hearts, we shall comply with every positive institute and particular precept which he hath enjoined in his word; and all such compliance contains just so much obedience as it contains love to him, and no more. Let an instance of Christian obedience be produced, if it can, which is not comprehended in the general precept of love.

In objecting to the perfection of the Ten Commandments, our adversaries would seem to hold with an extensive rule; but the design manifestly is to undermine their authority, and that without substituting any other competent rule in the place of them. In what follows, therefore I shall endeavour to prove both the authority and perfection of the law; or that the commandments of God, whether we consider them as ten or two, are still *binding* on Christians; and virtually contain the whole revealed will of God, as to the matter of obedience.

First: To prove that the Ten Commandments are binding, let any person read them, one by one, and ask his own conscience as he reads, Whether it would be any sin to break them? Is the believer at liberty to have other gods besides the true God? Would there be no harm in his making to himself a graven image, and falling down to worship it? Is it any less sin for a believer to take God's name in vain than for an unbeliever? Are believers at liberty to profane the Sabbath, or to disobey their parents, or to kill their neighbours, or to commit adultery, or to steal, or to bear false witness, or to covet what is not their own? Is this, or any part of it, the liberty of the gospel? Every conscience that is not seared as with a hot iron, must answer these question in the negative.

Secondly: It is utterly inconsistent with the nature of moral government, and of the great designs of mercy, as revealed in the gospel, that believers should be freed from obligation to love God with all their hearts; and their neighbours as themselves. The requirement of love is founded in the nature of the relation between God and a rational creature; and cannot be made void so long as the latter exists, unless the former were to deny himself. The relation between a father and son is such, that an obligation to love is indispensable; and should the son on having offended his father, be forgiven and restored, like the prodigal to his family, to pretend to be free on his account, were an outrage on decency. Every one must feel that his obligations, in such a case, are increased, rather than diminished.

Thirdly: It was solemnly declared by our Saviour, *That he came, not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it;* yea, *that heaven and earth should pass away, but not a jot or tittle of the law should fail.* A considerable part of his Sermon on the Mount is taken up in pointing out the true meaning of its particular precepts, and in enforcing them upon his disciples. To the same purpose the apostle Paul, after dwelling largely on justification by faith in Christ, in opposition to the works of the law asks, *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law.* But if the law ceases to be binding on believers, Christ did come to destroy its authority over them, and faith does make it void in respect of them. The faith of those who set Moses and Christ at variance, has manifestly this effect:—it is therefore, in opposition to the faith taught by our Saviour and the apostle Paul.

Fourthly: In executing the great work of redemption, our Saviour invariably did honour to the law: it was written in his heart. He did not ask for the salvation of his chosen at the expense of the law; but laid down his life to satisfy its righteous demands. Now, the essence of true religion is for the *same mind to be in us which was in Christ Jesus.* Hence he prayed that they all might be *one*, as the Father was in him, and he in the Father, that they might be *one* in both. The Lawgiver and the Saviour were one; and believers must be of one mind with the former as well as with the latter; but if we depreciate the law, which Christ delighted to

honour, and deny our obligations to obey it, how are we of his mind! Rather, are we not of that mind which is *enmity against God. which is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be?*

Fifthly: The Apostle, in what he writes to the Romans and the Galatians, (two Epistles, in which he largely explodes the idea of justification by the works of the law,) enforces *brotherly love as a requirement of the law. Love one another*, says he, *for love is the fulfilling of the law.—Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty as an occasion to the flesh, but by love, serve one another; for all the law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* If the liberty of the primitive Christians consisted in being delivered from an obligation to obey the precepts of the law, the reasoning of the Apostle was self contradictory: 'Ye are not obliged to love one another, because God in his law requires it; therefore, love one another, because God in his law requires it!!'

Sixthly: If the law be not a rule of conduct to believers, and a perfect rule too, they are under no rule; or, which is the same thing, are lawless. But, if so, they commit no sin; for *where no law is, there is no transgression;* and in this case they have no sins to confess either to God or to one another; nor do they stand in need of Christ as an Advocate with the Father; nor of daily forgiveness through his blood. Thus it is, that, by disowning the law, men utterly subvert the gospel. I am aware, that those who deny the law to be the rule of a believer's conduct, some of them, at least, will not pretend to be lawless. Sometimes they will profess to make the gospel their rule; but the gospel, strictly speaking, is not a rule of conduct, but a message of grace, providing for our conformity to the rule previously given. To set aside the moral law as a rule, and to substitute the gospel in its place, is making the gospel a new law; and affords a proof how Antinomianism and Neonomianism, after all their differences, can occasionally agree. The scriptures teach us, that *by the law is the knowledge of sin:* which clearly implies, that there is no sin but what is a breach of that rule. Hence sin is defined *the trangression of the law.* But if sin be the transgression of the law, the authority of

the law must be still binding; for no crime or offence attaches to the breach of a law which is abrogated or repealed; nor can it be known by such a law how much any man hath sinned, or whether he hath sinned at all. Moreover, if there be no sin but what is a transgression of the law, there can be no rule binding on men which is not comprehended in that law.

Seventhly: The Apostle writes as if there were no medium between being under the law to Christ, and without law.* If we be not the one, we are the other. Paul declares himself under *the* law to Christ; which implies that Christ has taken the precepts of the moral law as the first principles of his legislative code. Believers, therefore, instead of being freed from obligation to obey it, are under greater obligations to do so than any men in the world. To be exempt from this, is to be without law, and, of course, without sin; in which case we might do without a Saviour, which is utterly subversive of all religion.—I have been told, that believers are not to be ruled by the law, but by love; and that it is by the influence of the Spirit that they are moved to obedience, rather than by the precepts of the law. To this I answer, (1.) If a believer be ruled by love in such a way as to exclude obligation, this is the same as if a son should say to his father, 'I have no objection to oblige you, Sir: I will do your business from love; but I will not be commanded!' That is, what he pleases he will do, and no more.—No parent could bear such an answer from a child: and how can we suppose that God will bear it from us! *If I be a father, where is my honour?*—(2.) The question is not, What *moves* or *causes* obedience?—but, What is the *rule* of it? It is allowed, that all true obedience is caused by the influence of the Holy Spirit; but that to which he influences the mind was antecedently required of us: *He leadeth us in the way that we should go.*—(3.) If the influence of the Holy Spirit on the mind be made the rule of obligation, and that influence be effectual, it will follow, that believers are without sin; for whatever they are effectually influenced to do, they do; and if this be all they are obliged to do, then do they comply with their whole duty, and so are sinless. Thus, methinks, we have arrived at a state of sin-

* 1 Cor. ix. 21.

less perfection by a sort of backway! But, *let us not deceive ourselves: God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

After all, my dear friend, evidence, even that which is drawn from the word of God, will have little or no influence on minds which have drunk deeply into these corrupt principles. Where men have found out the secret of happiness without holiness, there is something so bewitching in it, that you might almost as well encounter insanity, as hope, by reasoning, to convince them. Indeed, I know of no characters to whom the words of the prophet, though spoken immediately of idolaters, will more fully apply: *He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?* There are, however, degrees in this kind of infatuation; and I doubt not but many sincere minds have been infected with it. If some of this description should be recovered, it is worth our utmost attention; and even those whose prejudices are the most inveterate, are not beyond the reach of omnipotent grace.

AN

ESSAY ON TRUTH:

CONTAINING AN ENQUIRY INTO ITS NATURE AND IMPORTANCE; WITH THE CAUSES OF ERROR, AND THE REASONS OF ITS BEING PERMITTED.

The multifarious and discordant sentiments which divide mankind, afford a great temptation to scepticism, and many are carried away by it. The open enemies of the gospel take occasion from hence to justify their rejection of it; and many of its professed friends have written as if they thought, that to be decided amidst so many minds and opinions were almost presumptuous. The principal, if not the only use which they would make of these differences is to induce a spirit of moderation and charity, and to declaim against bigotry.

To say nothing at present how these terms are perverted and hackneyed in a certain cause, let two things be seriously considered:—First, *Whether this was the use made by the apostles, of the discordant opinions which prevailed in their times, even among those who "acknowledged the divinity of our Saviour's mission?"* In differences among Christians which *did not affect the kingdom of God,* nor *destroy the work of God, it certainly was:* such were those concerning meats, drinks, and days; in which the utmost forbearance was inculcated. But it was otherwise in differences which affected the leading doctrines and precepts of Christianity. Forbearance in these cases would, in the account of the sacred writers, have been a crime. Paul would they were even cut off who troubled the Galatian churches, by corrupting the Christian

doctrine of justification. And it is recorded to the honour of the church at Ephesus, that it *could not bear* them that were evil; but had tried them who said they were apostles and were not, and found them liars.* Secondly, *Whether an unfavourable opinion of those who reject what we account the leading principles of Christianity, supposing it to be wrong, be equally injurious with a contrary opinion, supposing that to be wrong?* To think unfavourably of another does not affect his state towards God: if, therefore, it should prove to be wrong, it only interrupts present happiness. We have lately been told indeed, but from what authority I cannot conceive, that "The readiest way in the world to thin heaven and to replenish the regions of hell, is to call in the spirit of bigotry." Far be it from me to advocate the cause of bigotry, or to plead for a bitter, censorious spirit, a spirit that would confine the kingdom of heaven to a party: but I do not perceive how this spirit, bad as it is, is productive of the effects ascribed to it. If, on the other hand, through an aversion to bigotry, we treat those as Christians to whom an Apostle would at least have said *I stand in doubt of you*, we flatter and deceive them; which is really "the readiest way in the world to thin heaven, and to replenish the regions of hell."

Surely there is a medium between bigotry, and esteeming and treating men as Christians, irrespective of their avowed principles. Certainly, a benevolent and candid treatment is due to men of all denominations: but to consider all principles as equally safe is to consider truth as of no importance.

Let us candidly inquire, Christian reader, whether, notwithstanding the diversity of sentiments in the Christian world, truth may not be clearly ascertained? Whether it be not of the utmost importance? Whether the prevalence of error may not be accounted for? And, lastly, Whether the wisdom, as well as the justice of God, may not be seen in his permitting it?

WHAT IS TRUTH?

In attempting to answer this question, I desire to take nothing for granted, but that Christianity is of God, and that the scriptures are

* Gal. v. 12. Rev. ii. 2.

a revelation of his will. If Christianity be of God, and he have revealed his will in the holy scriptures, light is come into the world, though the dark minds of sinful creatures comprehend it not. It does not follow, because many wander in mazes of fruitless speculation, that there is not a way so plain that a wayfaring man, or one who "walketh in the truth," though a fool, shall not err. The numerous sects among the Greeks and Romans, and even among the Jews, at the time of our Saviour's appearing, did not prove that there was no certain knowledge to be obtained of what was truth. Our Lord considered himself as speaking plainly, or he would not have asked the Jews as he did, *Why do ye not understand my speech?* The apostles and primitive believers saw their way plainly: and though we cannot pretend to the extraordinary inspiration which was possessed by many of them; yet if we humbly follow their light, depending on the ordinary teachings of God's Holy Spirit, we shall see ours.

Truth, we may be certain, is the same thing as what in the scriptures is denominated *the gospel*, *the common salvation*, *the common faith*, *the faith once delivered to the saints*, *the truth as it is in Jesus*, &c. and what this is, may be clearly understood by the brief summaries of the gospel, and of the faith of the primitive Christians, which abound in the New Testament. Of the former, the following are a few of many examples: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—The Son of Man came to seek and save that which is lost.—I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.—To him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.—I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.—Moreover, brethren I declare unto you* THE GOSPEL *which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and* WHEREIN YE STAND; *by which also ye are* SAVED, *if ye hold fast what I preached to you, unless ye have believed in vain: for I delivered unto you first of*

all that which I also received, how that Christ DIED FOR OUR SINS *according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures.—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that* CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS, *of whom I am chief.—This is* THE RECORD, *that* GOD HATH GIVEN TO US ETERNAL LIFE, *and this life is* IN HIS SON.—*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

If language have any determinate meaning, it is here plainly taught that mankind are not only sinners, but in a *lost* and perishing condition, without help or hope, but what arises from the free grace of God, through the atonement of his Son; that he died as our substitute; that we are forgiven and accepted only for the sake of what he hath done and suffered; that in his person and work all evangelical truth concentrates; that the doctrine of salvation for the chief of sinners through his death was so familiar in the primitive times as to become a kind of Christian proverb, or *saying;* and that on our receiving and retaining this, depends our present *standing*, and final *salvation*. If this doctrine be received, Christianity is received: if not, the record which God hath given of his Son is rejected, and he himself treated as a liar.

When this doctrine is received in the true spirit of it, (which it never is but by a sinner ready to perish,) all those fruitless speculations which tend only to bewilder the mind will be laid aside; just as malice, and guile, and envies, and evil speakings, are laid aside by him who is born of God. They will fall off from the mind, like the coat of the crysalis, of their own accord. Many instances of this are constantly occurring. Persons who, after having read and studied controversies, and leaned first to one opinion and then to another, till their minds have been lost in uncertainty, have at length been brought to think of the gospel, not as a matter of speculation, but as that which seriously and immediately concerns them; and embracing it as good news to them who are ready to perish; have not only found rest to their souls, but all their former notions have departed from them as a dream when one awaketh

Corresponding with the brief summaries of the gospel are the concise accounts given of the *faith* of the primitive Christians.—*Whosoever believeth that* JESUS IS THE CHRIST, *is born of God.*—*Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that* JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD?—*If thou shalt confess with thy mouth* THE LORD JESUS, *and believe in thine heart that* GOD HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, *thou shalt be saved.* The sacred writers did not mean, by this language, to magnify the belief of one or two divine truths at the expense of others; but to exhibit them as bearing an inseparable connexion: so that if these were truly embraced, the other would be certain to accompany them. They considered the doctrine of the person and work of Christ as a golden link, that would draw along with it the whole chain of evangelical truth. Hence we perceive the propriety of such language as the following: *He that* HATH THE SON, *hath life, and he that* HATH NOT THE SON, *hath not life.*—*Whosoever* DENIETH THE SON, *the same hath not the Father.*

The doctrine and the faith of the primitive Christians were summarily avowed every time they celebrated the *Lord's supper.* The leading truth exhibited by that ordinance is the same which, John calls *the record;* namely, that *God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* Under the form of a feast, of which we are invited to take, to eat, and to drink, are set forth the blessings of the new testament, or covenant, and the medium through which they were obtained; namely, *the blood of Jesus shed for many for the remission of sins;* and the way in which they must be received; that is to say, as a *free gift*, bestowed on the unworthy for his sake. If this simple doctrine were believed with the spirit of a little child, and lived upon as our meat and drink, we might take an everlasting leave of speculations on things beyond our reach; and that without sustaining the loss of any thing but what were better lost than retained.

IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH

If the above remarks may be thought sufficient to ascertain what is truth, its *importance* follows as a necessary consequence. If, as transgressors, we be exposed to the eternal displeasure of our

Maker ; if a door of hope be opened to us ; if it be at no less an expense than the death of God's only-begotten Son in our nature ; if, through this great propitiation, God can be just, and the justifier of believers : finally, if this be the only way of escape, and the present the only state in which it is possible to flee to it for refuge, who, that is not infatuated by the delusions of this world, can make light of it ? There is an importance in truth, as it relates to philosophy, history, politics, or any other branch of science, inasmuch as it affects the present happiness of mankind : but what is this when compared with that which involves their everlasting salvation ? To be furnished with an answer to the question, *What shall I do to be saved ?* is of infinitely greater account than to be able to decide whether the Ptolemaic or Copernican system be that of nature. The temporal salvation of a nation, great as it is, and greatly as it interests the minds of men, is nothing when compared with the eternal salvation of a single individual.

But many, who would not deny the superior value of eternal salvation to all other things, have yet gone about to depreciate the importance of divine truth, and to represent it as having no necessary connexion with either present holiness or future happiness. Such appears to have been the design of those well-known lines of Pope :

> " For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight :
> His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

And to the same purpose we have often been told in prose, that *we shall not be judged at the last day by our opinions, but by our works.* If truth and error existed in the mind merely as *opinions*, or objects of speculation, they might possibly have but little influence upon us : but if they be *principles* of action, they enter into the essence of all we do. Such is the influence of living faith, otherwise it could not be *shown by our works* : and such is that of the belief of falsehood, else we had not read of the word of false teachers *eating as doth a gangrene.** The *works* by which we shall be judged cannot mean actions, *in distinction* from their principles ; (for as such they would contain neither good nor evil ;)

* γαγγραινα, James ii. 18. 2 Tim. ii. 17.

but *as connected with them.* All pretences, therefore, to separate the one from the other, are as contrary to reason as to scripture.

To render this subject more evident, let the following particulars be duly considered.

First: *It is by the belief of truth that sinners are brought into a state of salvation.*—Great things are ascribed in the scriptures to faith: but faith could have no existence without revealed truth as its foundation. Whatever importance, therefore, attaches to one attaches to the other. The great blessing of justification is constantly ascribed to faith, not as the reward of a virtue, but as that by which we become one with Christ, and so partakers of his benefits. While unbelievers, we have no revealed interest in the divine favour; but, are declared to be under condemnation: but believing in him, we are no longer *under the law*, as a term of life and death but *under grace.* Hence it is, that in the gospel, as *heard and received*, we are said to *stand.* Take away evangelical truth, and you take away the *standing* of a Christian. Bereaved of this, the best man upon earth must despair of salvation.

Secondly: *Truth is the model and standard of true religion in the mind.*—That doctrines, whether true or false, if really believed, become principles of action, that they are a mould into which the mind is cast, and from which it receives its impression; is evident, both from scripture and experience. An observant eye will easily perceive a spirit which attaches to the different species of religion; and which, over and above the diversities arising from natural temper, will manifest itself in their respective followers. Paganism, Mahometanism, Deism, Apostate Judaism, and various systems which have appeared under the name of Christianity, have each discovered a spirit of their own. Thus also it was from the beginning. Those who received *another doctrine*, received with it *another* SPIRIT: and hence we read of *the* SPIRIT *of truth, and the* SPIRIT *of error.* He that had the one is said to be *of God*, and he that had the other, *not of God.**

Revealed truth is represented as a FORM *of doctrine into which believers are delivered.*† As a melted substance, cast into a mould, receives its form from it, and every line in the one corres-

* 2 Cor. xi. 4. 1 John iv. 6. † Rom. vi. 17

ponds with that of the other ; so true religion in the soul accords with true religion in the scriptures. Without this standard, we shall either model our faith by our own pre-conceived notions of what is fit and reasonable, or be carried away by our feelings, and lose ourselves among the extravagant vagaries of enthusiasm. Our views may seem to us very rational, or our feelings may be singularly ardent; and yet we may be far from being in the right. The question is, Whether they agree line to line with the divine model ? God saith, in his word, *Seek ye my face.* If our hearts say unto him, *Thy face, Lord, will we seek,* then does line answer to line ; and this is true religion. Is it a leading feature of evangelical truth, that it honours the divine character and government ? It is the same with true religion in the mind. Does that manifest love even to enemies ? So does this. Is it the object of the former to abase the pride of man ? It is no less the nature of the latter to rejoice in lying low. Finally : Is the one averse from all iniquity, and friendly to universal holiness ? The other, dissatisfied with present attainments, *presseth toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Thirdly : *Truth is that which furnishes the motive for every exercise of true holiness.* If once we are enabled to behold its glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it changes us into the same image, begets and excites holy affections, and every kind of gracious exercise. Hence we are said to know the truth, and the truth to make us free ; to be *sanctified* through it, and *begotten* by it.*

It is not denied, that there is much of what is called *morality*, in persons who know and believe nothing to purpose, of evangelical truth. Honour, interest, and the habits of education, will induce men to shun open immoralities, and to comply with things which are reputable and praiseworthy. But though there be great cause for thankfulness to God, who, by his providence, thus restrains mankind from much evil ; yet this is not holiness. Holiness is the love of God and one another; whereas this is mere self-love, All works and worship of this kind are no better than the offering of Cain, which, being without faith, could not please God.

* John viii. 32. xvii. 17. James i. 18.

And, as there may be a semblance of holiness without faith, so there may be a semblance of faith without holiness. The doctrines of the Bible, though in themselves practical, yet may be treated as mere speculations, and frequently are so by men who profess to believe them; and where this is the case, instead of producing holiness, they may have a contrary effect: but this is owing to their being perverted. God's words do good to the upright. There is not a sentiment in the living oracles but what, if received in the true spirit and intent of it, will contribute to the sanctification of the mind.

True religion is, with great beauty and propriety, called *walking in the truth*. A life of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness is Christian principle reduced to practice. Truth is a system of love, an overflow of the divine blessedness, as is intimated by its being called *the glorious gospel of the* BLESSED *God*: a system of reconciliation, peace, and forgiveness; full of the most amazing condescension, and of spotless rectitude. To walk in truth like this, is to walk in love, to be tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us; to be of the same mind with him who made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and to be holy in all manner of conversation.

Such were the fruits of truth which were actually brought forth by the primitive believers; and such, in different degrees, notwithstanding the many defects and scandals which abound among us, are the fruits of it in true Christians to this day. Thousands of examples, both in earlier and later times, might be produced, in which men who previously walked according to the course of this world, in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, in strife and envying, on embracing the doctrine of Christ crucified, have put off all these, and become, as it were, new creatures.

It is also worthy of special notice, that in every instance in which the primitive churches deviated from the *doctrine* of the apostles, they appear to have degenerated as to zeal and practical godliness. A careful review of the Epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Hebrews, who departed more than any other

churches from the simplicity of the gospel, would furnish proof of the justness of this remark. It was not without reason that Paul observed to the Corinthians, *Evil communications corrupt good manners;* by which he appears to have meant the communications of false teachers, who endeavoured to undermine the resurrection, and other important truths. And such was the corruption of manners which accompanied these notions, that, degenerate as we consider ourselves, compared with the primitive Christians, if any one of our churches tolerated the same things, we should be almost ready to pronounce it a synagogue of Satan. Among other things they divided into parties, boasted of the talents of their preachers, connived at the most unnatural kind of fornication, went to law with one another, communed with idolaters at their temples, and profaned the supper of the Lord, by appropriating it to purposes of sensual indulgence! Such were the fruits of error.

If we look into the Epistle to the Galatians, who had been turned aside from the apostolic doctrine of justification, we shall find fruits of the same kind. They are described as *not obeying the truth*, as *foolish*, as in a manner *bewitched;* as having lost their former *zeal*, and rendered their Christianity a matter of *doubt*; as needing to have *Christ again formed in them;* and it is strongly intimated that they were guilty of *biting*, and as it were *devouring* one another; of *fulfilling the lusts of the flesh*, and of coveting *vain-glory, provoking one another, and envying one another.**

If the Hebrews had not, in turning aside from the truth, been injured in their spirit and conduct, it is very improbable that such language as the following would have been addressed to them: *Wherefore, as the Holy Spirit saith, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years: wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest.—Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of* you *an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God!—*

* See Chap. iii. 1. iv. 11. 19, 20. v. 7. 15, 16. 26.

Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin! Neither is it likely, if no such symptoms had appeared among them, that they would have been exhorted to *look diligently, lest any man should fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up should trouble them, and thereby many be defiled; lest there should be any* FORNICATOR, *or* PROFANE PERSON, *as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.* Finally: It is not probable that so solemn a warning against whoredom and adultery would have been introduced, and the offenders cited as it were to the tribunal of God, if there had been no occasion for it in their own conduct.*

Whether these instances of the pernicious effects of error in the primitive churches, be not in direct opposition to the modern notions before stated, let the reader judge. Nor are such things peculiar to the primitive churches. If you see men desert the principles before stated, or hold them in a corrupted sense, you may commonly perceive a change in their *spirit.* They may retain what is called character, in the eyes of the world: but the savour of godliness is departed. They may retain their zeal; but it will be confined to some little peculiarity, to the neglect of the common faith. There will be a want of that lovely *proportion* which constitutes the true beauty of holiness. A man who chews opium, or tobacco, may prefer them to the most wholesome food, and may derive from them pleasure, and even vigiour for a time; but his pale countenance, and debilitated constitution, will soon bear witness to the folly of spending his money for that which is not bread.

Fourthly: *The love which the primitive Christians bore to one another was* FOR THE TRUTH'S SAKE †—Now, that *for the sake of which* we love a person, is considered as of greater importance than any things else pertaining to him. It is that which constitutes his value in our esteem: and which if he abandon, we should no longer esteem him.

* Chap. iii. 7—13. xii. 12, 13. 15, 16. xiii. 4. †2 John 2, 3 John 1.

Here we may perceive what is essential to the true legitimate *charity* of the primitive Christians. Instead of regarding men irrespectively of their principles, they *knew no man after the flesh.* John, who was the most loving, or charitable, perhaps of all the disciples of Christ, is so far from considering a departure from the truth as a light matter, and the subject of it as entitled to the same Christian affection as heretofore, that he expressly writes as follows: —*Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ* HATH NOT GOD.—*If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine*, RECEIVE HIM NOT INTO YOUR HOUSE, *neither bid him God-speed ; for he that biddeth him God-speed is* PARTAKER OF HIS EVIL DEEDS. Would not such language, I ask, in our days be reckoned very uncharitable? It would. But this proves beyond all reasonable doubt, that the common ideas of charity are antiscriptural. Charity will not take it for granted, that whosoever deviates from *our* views must needs deviate from the doctrine of Christ ; but will carefully inquire at the oracles of God, what is truth? Yet there is no need of being ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of it. The lady whom John addressed was supposed to be able to distinguish between those who *brought the doctrine of Christ*, and those who came without it ; and so are Christians in the present day. Charity *hopeth all things*, and will always put the most favourable construction upon the motives of others that truth will admit: but without truth, as its ground and guide, it will not proceed.

Here also we may see the nature of Christian *unity.* It is not merely for two or more persons to be *agreed;* for this they may be, in evil. This is mere party-attachment. It is natural for men to love those who think and act like themselves, and that *for their own sake.* But *Christian* unity is to love one another *for Christ's sake*, and *for the truth's sake* that dwelleth in them. Christ, as revealed in the gospel, forms the great point of union. A number of minds are drawn towards this point ; and the nearer they approximate to it, the nearer they approach to an union with one another. If all true Christians were nearer to the mind of Christ, their differences would soon subside ; and they would

feel themselves, as they approached it, to be of one heart and of one soul.

Lastly: *Truth is the only solid foundation of peace and happiness.*—There are cases, it is granted, in which the mind may rejoice in error, or be distressed by truth. False doctrine will operate like opium, filling the imagination with pleasing dreams; but all is transient and delusive. Truth, on the other hand, when it barely commendeth itself to the conscience of a sinner, may render him extremely unhappy. Such was the effect of Judas' conviction of Christ's innocence: and such is the effect of similar convictions in the present times. But where truth takes possession of the heart; or, as the scriptures express it, where we *receive the love of the truth*, peace and joy accompany it. This is a fact established by history and experience, and is easily accounted for. Revealed truth carries in it a message of pardon, reconciliation, and eternal life; and all in a way honourable to the divine character and government. This, in itself, is good news: and to every one who, as a sinner ready to perish, receiveth it, is a source of solid and lasting happiness. Truth also pours light upon all the dark and mysterious events of time, and teaches us, while weeping over human misery not to despond or repine; but, viewing things on a large scale, to rejoice in whatever is. It exhibits God upon the throne of the universe, ordering every thing for the best; and thus reconciles the mind to present ill, by pointing it to the good that shall ultimately rise out of it.

Contrast with this the horrible complaints of an infidel. "Who can, without horror, consider the whole earth as the empire of destruction? It abounds in wonders; it abounds also in victims; it is a vast field of carnage and contagion? Every species is, without pity, pursued and torn to pieces, through the earth, and air, and water! In man there is more wretchedness than in all other animals put together. He smarts continually under two scourges which other animals never feel; anxiety, and listlessness in appetence, which makes him weary of himself. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoy some transient good, for which he is thankful to heaven, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative.

Other animals have it not. He feels it every moment rankling and corroding in his breast. Yet he spends the transient moment of his existence in diffusing the misery which he suffers: in cutting the troats of his fellow-creatures for pay; in cheating and being cheated; in robbing and being robbed; in serving, that he may command; and in repenting of all that he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches, equally criminal and unfortunate; and the globe contains rather carcasses than men. I tremble, upon a review of this dreadful picture, to find that it implies a complaint against PROVIDENCE; *and I wish that I had never been born!*"* Such is the boasted happiness of unbelievers.

And, though we should not go these lengths, yet if we forsake truth by deviating materially from any of the great doctrines of the gospel, it will affect our peace. Error is the wandering of the mind when it thinks without a guide; the issue of which is *stumbling upon the dark mountains.* It is possible, in such circumstances, that the stupor of insensibility may be mistaken for the peace of God; but if the soul be once roused from its slumber, especially if it be the subject of any true religion, it will find itself miserable. As soon might we expect to find happiness in the mind of one who has lost his way, and knoweth not whither he goeth, as in a mind that has deviated from evangelical truth.

CAUSES OF ERROR.

If truth be of this importance, it may be enquired, How are we to account for the great diversity of sentiment in the religious world? Whence is it that professing Christians, even the wise and the good among them, should be so divided?

It certainly is not owing to any thing in Christianity itself. This will be found, on the strictest inquiry, to be one consistent whole; and all its precepts tend to unity of judgment, as well as of affection. To this end were all the Epistles addressed to the primitive churches. In some, the writers labour to establish them in the

* Voltaire.

truth ; in others to reclaim them from error ; in all, to promote a holy unanimity in principle and practice.

Yet, if we look to *fact*, we find that the churches, even in the purest ages, were never free from error. It was beyond the power of the apostles, inspired as they were, effectually to guard them against it. Of this the afore-mentioned Epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Hebrews are standing proofs ; and in after ages things were much worse. Those principles which at first were but the bud, or at most the blade, now became the full ear and produced a harvest and apostasy. The history of Christianity from that day to this, is the history of one continued struggle between truth and error ; the mind of Christ, and the reasonings of the flesh. Nor was this state of things unknown to the apostles : they saw, in their times, *the mystery of iniquity begin to work*, and by the spirit of inspiration foretold its progress. *In the latter times*, say they, *some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons.—In the last days perilous times shall come, in which men shall be lovers of their ownselves : ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.* And that, *as there were false prophets among the* [Jewish] *people, so there should be false teachers among* [Christians,] *who would bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them; and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

What shall we say then ? Shall we attribute the multifarious and discordant doctrines of past and present times to diversity of habits, educations, and connexions ; to the various tastes and talents found among men ; or to the frailty and imbecility of the human mind ? These things may be allowed to have their influence : but it is not to them principally that the scriptures attribute the corruption of Christian doctrine or worship.

There is an important difference between *diversity* and *contrariety*. The former belongs to men as men, which the latter does not. One man comprehends more of truth, another less ; this has a talent for discovering one part of truth, and that another ; but in all this there is nothing *discordant*, any more than in a diversity of features, or in the variegated face of the earth, which abounds in divers kinds of flowers, every one of which contrib-

utes to the beauty of the whole. It is not so with respect to truth and error, which are as opposite as right and wrong. True doctrines are the plants, and false doctrines the weeds of the church. They cannot both flourish in the same mind. The one must be rooted up, or the other will be overrun and rendered unproductive.

The causes which the scriptures assign for the corruption of Christian doctrine, are principally, if not entirely, of a moral nature. They represent evangelical truth as a holy doctrine, and as that which cannot be understood by an unholy mind. *The natural* (or mere worldly wise) *man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* They are *hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes*; and thus *it seemeth good in his sight*, whose mind it is to abase the pride of man. If the gospel had been *the wisdom of this world, the spirit of this world* would have sufficed to understand it; and there would be no more errors concerning it, than what arise from the imbecility of the human mind on all other subjects; but it is not: it is the wisdom that is from above, and therefore requires a state of mind suited to it; or, as the Apostle expresses it, that *we receive not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we may know the things which are freely given to us of God.* Now, this being the case, so far as we attempt to judge, preach, or write of the gospel, under the influence of mere worldly wisdom, or in any other than its own spirit, we are morally certain, in some way or other, to pervert it.

Here then are open to our view three grand sources of error; namely, The numbers of unconverted, or mere worldly-wise characters, who intrude themselves, or are intruded by others, into the Christian ministry—The greater number of merely nominal Christians, whose taste calls for anti-scriptural preaching—And the large portion of unsanctified wisdom found even in godly men.

First: The great number of *unconverted ministers.* Far be it from me to judge of men otherwise than by what they manifest themselves to be. I abhor the spirit of our modern Antinomians who would persuade us that they know good ministers from others

by a kind of spiritual physiognomy; but who, if the tree be known by the fruits, have much more reason to judge themselves. Yet the personal religion of many preachers must be allowed, by charity itself, to wear more than a suspicious appearance; nor is it surprising that it should be so. If, in the purest age of the church, when there were but few attractions for covetousness and ambition, there were "men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith;" men who had "the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof;" is it any wonder that there should be such in our times? And, as the introduction of almost every error among the primitive Christians is attributed to this sort of characters, is it not reasonable to expect that things should move on in the same direction?

An unrenewed person, whatever be his education, talents, or natural temper, can never fall in with Christianity, as it is taught in the New Testament. If therefore, he occupy a station in the church, he will be almost certain to transform religion so as to suit himself. This, it is clear, was the grand source of the Romish apostacy. No sooner was Christianity adopted by the state, than it became the interest of worldly men to profess it. Ecclesiastical offices were soon filled, in a great degree, by unbelievers in disguise. The effect was, as might have been expected, the doctrine, worship, discipline, and spirit of the gospel, were gradually lost, and a system of corruption was substituted in their place.

This has been a source of departure from the truth down to the present times; and that, in different degrees, among all denominations of Christians. If we look into the establishments of Protestant Europe, we shall find that in spite of oaths and subscriptions, devised in former ages for the security of orthodoxy, worldly men have a system of their own, and will explain their articles and creeds according to it. Or, if we look out of establishments, wherever worldly men are admitted to the work of the ministry, we shall find things much the same. Some of the greatest perverters of the gospel, during the last century, have descended from pious parents, who, fond of the idea of bringing up their children to the public service of God, overlooked the necessity of personal religion; presuming, as it would seem, that God would, in due

time, supply that defect. The consequence was, the young men, finding evangelical truth sit uneasily upon them, threw it off and embraced a system more suited to the state of their minds.

Observing these things among men of education, many serious people have contracted a prejudice against learning itself; and have preferred the preaching of the most illiterate, for the sake of a pure doctrine. But neither is this any security: for men of assurance and address, pretending to extraordinary light and marvellous inspirations, will often obtrude themselves upon the people, and draw disciples after them, especially from among the unthinking und light-minded part of Christian professors. In them the words of Peter have been eminently fulfilled: *Speaking great swelling words of vanity, they have allured, through the lusts of the flesh, those that for a while were escaped from them who live in error.* Nor has their influence been confined to such characters: sincere people have frequently been misled by their specious pretences. When Judas, professing a solicitude for the poor, condemned an expression of love to Christ, as an unnecessary piece of wastefulness, he drew away the other disciples after him. In short, men who have not the spirit by which the gospel was dictated, will not cleave to it. Some may err on this side, and some on that: some, having greater talents, may do greater injury to it, and others less; but all, in one way or other, will pervert it: and where this is the case, *many will follow their pernicious ways; and the way of truth*, being comfounded with them, *will be evil spoken of.*

Secondly: The great number of merely *nominal Christians.*— In the present state of things, the bulk of mankind are not governed by principle, but by custom; following the course of this world, whatever direction it may take. In one country they are Heathens, in another Mahometans, and in another Christians: in other words, they are of *no religion.* The effect of this is, that a large proportion of ministers are certain to be nominated and chosen by men who have no taste for the searching, humbling, and holy doctrine of the gospel, but are utterly averse from it; and where this is the case, it requires but little discernment to perceive what will be the general tone of preaching. Even in congregational churches, if the people, or the leading individuals among them

be worldly-minded, ambitious, or in any respect loose livers, they will not be at a loss to find preachers after their own heart Thus error is propagated, and thus it was propagated from a very early period. *The time will come*, said Paul to Timothy, *when they will not endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

Thirdly : The large portion of *unsanctified wisdom, found even in godly men.*—The wisdom of this world, as opposed to the wisdom of God, is not confined to mere worldly men. The apostle, after speaking of spiritual men as *judging all things*, and as *having the mind of Christ*, adds, *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal ; even as unto babes in Christ.* And this, their carnality, is represented as rendering them unable to understand the great doctrines of Christianity, which are compared to *meat*, and as leading them to build upon the gospel-foundation a mixture of *wood, and hay, and stubble ;* all of which shall be burnt up another day, though they themselves shall be saved.*

There is a *slowness of heart*, even in good men, to believe what God has revealed, especially if it clash with their pre-conceived ideas. Such was the state of mind of the apostles themselves, previously to the resurrection of their Lord : and such is the state of mind of great numbers among us. We often hear men in controversy talk of being open to conviction, and willing to retract their sentiments, if but fairly confuted : but such professions either mean but little, or at best indicate a great want of self-knowledge. Those who are the most open to conviction, will commonly suspect themselves the most, and of course will not be very forward in the use of such language. If there were not a *slowness of heart*, both in receiving truth and relinquishing error, a large proportion of our controversies would soon be at an end.

REASONS WHY ERROR IS PERMITTED.

The foregoing remarks may suffice to account for the prevalence

* 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7. 12, 15, 16. iii. 1, 2. 12—17.

of error, so far as *man* is concerned; but it may be farther inquired, Wherefore doth *God* permit it? Why is it that the beauty of the Christian church is suffered to be marred, and its peace invaded by a succession of perpetual discords? This is an awful subject; and if we were left to our own conjectures upon it, it would be our wisdom to leave it to the great day, when all things will be made manifest: but we are not. The scriptures of truth inform us, that *there must needs be heresies, that they who are approved may be made manifest.*

All the influences to which we are exposed in the present life, are adapted to a state of probation, and to do us good or harm, according to the state of mind which we possess. We are not only fearfully made, but as fearfully situated. The evidence in favour of true religion is sufficient for a candid mind; but not for one that is disposed to cavil. If we attend to it simply to find out truth, and obey it, we shall not be disappointed; but if our souls be lifted up within us, the very rock of salvation will be to us a stone of stumbling. The Jews required a sign *in their own way: Let him come down from the cross*, said they, *and we will believe him.* 'If he had *publicly* risen from the dead,' say modern unbelievers, 'none could have doubted it.' Yet he neither came down from the cross, nor rose publicly from the dead; and let them say, if they please, he could not, and that all his miracles were the work of imposture. It may be *our* duty, as much as in us lies, to cut off occasion from them who desire occasion: but God often acts otherwise. They who *desire* a handle to renounce the gospel, shall have it. Thus it is that men are *tried* by false doctrine, and even by the immoralities of professing Christians.

The visible kingdom of Christ is a floor containing a mixture of wheat and chaff; and every false doctrine is a wind, which he, whose fan is in his hand, makes use of to purge it. There are great numbers of characters who profess to receive the truth, on whom, notwithstanding, it never sat easily. Its holy and humbling nature galls their spirits. In such cases, the mind is prepared to receive any representation of the gospel, however fallacious, that may comport with its desires; and being thus averse to the truth, God, in just judgment, frequently suffers the winds of false doctrine

to sweep them away. Such is the account prophetically given of the chief instruments in the Romish apostacy. The introduction of that mystery of iniquity is thus described: *Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Not only is *false* doctrine permitted, that it may sweep away hypocritical characters; but the *discordance* which appears among the professors of Christianity is itself a temptation to many, and that in divers ways. Some who consider themselves as almost, if not altogether infallible, are hereby furnished with a plea for *intolerance and persecution.* In this way it operated much in former ages, and a portion of it is still prevalent among us. 'You see,' say they, 'whither this liberty of conscience will lead men. If they be left to themselves, and form their own notions of religion, there will be no end to their errors and divisions, and to the sects that will arise out of them.' Thus the Catholics attempted to discredit the reformtion; and thus some Protestants have endeavoured to discredit congregational church-government, as fruitful of sects and divisions. But if either of them were required to prove that there is less error or opposition among themselves than among their neighbours, they might find it a difficult task. On one side, men find it necessary either not to think all, or to conceal their sentiments; on the other, they speak and write their minds with greater freedom; but things are what they are, whether they be avowed or not. He who persecutes men for their errors, may at last be found equally erroneous himself: but allowing that he is not, and that his creed is orthodox, yet he is far from being *sound in the faith.* in the scriptural sense of the words. He *knoweth not what manner of spirit he is of.* He may be willing to fight; but has yet to learn what are those weapons by which the soldiers of the Lamb are enabled to overcome.

Others, on the same ground, have *rejected all religion.* 'You cannot agree,' say they, 'as to what is truth: settle it among yourselves,

before you attempt to trouble us with it.' Very well: if you can satisfy your consciences with this evasion, do so. It will not avail you at death or judgment, You will then be reminded that you did not reason thus in things to which your *hearts were inclined;* but applied with all your powers, and used every possible means to ascertain the truth for yourselves, and acted accordingly. On your own principles, therefore, will you be judged.

Others, who have not gone these lengths, have yet been tempted to despair of finding out what is the true religion. 'Amidst the opposition of opinion which continually presents itself before us,' say they, 'how are we plain people to judge and act?' If you mean to intimate, that it is vain for you to concern yourselves about it, that is the same as saying, it is vain to attempt any thing that is accompanied with difficulties, or to walk in any way that is attended with temptations; and this would lead you to stand still in other things as well as in religion. But if it be the real desire of your soul to know the right way and walk in it, there is no reason to despair. Follow no man as your guide; but go to your Bible and your God, and there decide the question. You need not say in your heart, *Who shall ascend into heaven; or who shall descend into the deep? The word is nigh thee.* To read controversial books may, in many cases, be useful: but seldom, when it is done with a view to decide the great question, What is the right way to everlasting life? A book, as well as a sermon, *may* be the means of affording such direction. But when the mind is in a state of suspense, it is, beyond all comparison, the safest to consult the oracles of God. To launch into controversy, without having obtained satisfaction on the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, is to put to sea in a storm, without a rudder. One great reason why men are *caried about with divers and strange doctrines*, is, their *hearts are not established with grace.* They have no principles of their own, and therefore are carried away with any thing that wears the appearance of plausibility.

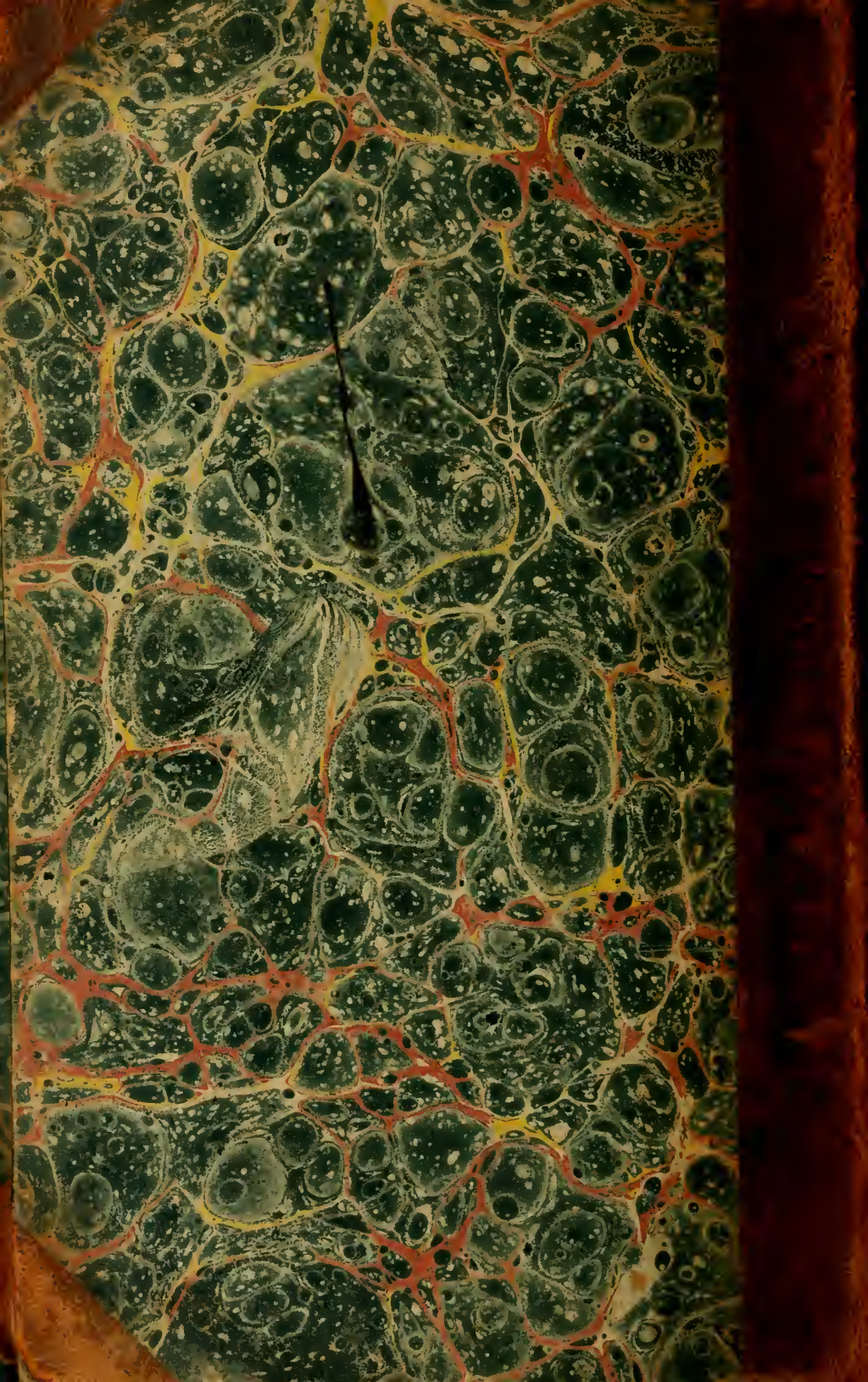
But one of the worst inferences drawn from the discordant doctrines which abound in the world is, that doctrine itself is of little or no account. As intolerance and bigotry, under the specious name of zeal, distinguished former ages, so sceptical indifference,

under the specious names of candour, liberality, and moderation, distinguishes this. This is the grand temptation, perhaps of the present times. It would seem as if men must either fight for truth with carnal weapons, or make peace with error; either our religious principles must be cognizable by human legislators, or they are neither good nor evil, and God himself must not call us to account for them; either we must call men masters upon earth, or deny that we have any master, even in heaven.

It is a favourite principle with unbelievers, and with many professing Christians who verge towards them, that error not only has its seat in the mind, but that it is *purely* intellectual, and therefore *innocent*. Hence they plead against all church censures, and every degree of unfavourable opinion on account of doctrinal sentiments, as though it were a species of persecution. But if the causes of error be principally *moral*, it will follow that such conclusions are as contrary to reason as they are to scripture.

The above remarks are far from being designed to cherish a spirit of bitterness against one another, as men, or as Christians. There is a way of viewing the corruption and depravity of mankind, so as to excite bitterness and wrath, and every species of evil temper; and there is a way of viewing them, that, without approving or conniving at what is wrong, shall excite the tear of compassion. It does not become us to declaim against the wickedness of the wicked in a manner as if we expected grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles: but, while we prove ourselves the decided friends of God, to bear good will to men. It becomes those who may be the most firmly established in the truth as it is in Jesus, to consider that a portion of the errors of the age, in all probability, attaches to them; and though it were otherwise, yet they are directed to carry it benevolently towards others who may err: *In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God, peradventure, will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth.*

Finally: There is an important difference between razing the foundation, and building upon that foundation a portion of wood, and hay, and stubble. It becomes us not to make light of either: but the latter may be an object of forbearance, whereas the former is not. With the enemies of Christ, we ought, in religious mat-

ters, to make no terms; but towards his friends, though in some respects erroneous, it behoves us to come as near as it is possible to do, without a direliction of principle. A truly Christian spirit will feel the force of such language as the following, and will act upon it: *All that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, grace be unto them, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.—Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity?*

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.